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The Universal Christ



As creatures of the Creator we exist in space as well as in time. Having considered what the Incarnation means in terms of the "fullness of time," we need also to reconsider what "space" means in terms of the coming of the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

At one time in a pre-scientific age many subscribed to the idea of a "3-decker Universe." Heaven was a realm beyond the upper firmament, which being sky blue indicated a body of water above the earthly realm. Beyond this membrane of water existed heaven, the abode of the gods or God. The topology of this realm varied from culture to culture, religion to religion but it was essentially unreachable. The earth formed the second layer, invariably flat with the abyss beyond the edge of the known world and lying at the centre of the Universe. Underneath the earth lay the third layer, its volcanic, seismic and dark character indicating Sheol, Hades, the Underworld or Hell. Here departed souls faded away, lay imprisoned or suffered in torment.

All this has changed forever, first with Copernicus who dislodged earth from the centre of things, Galileo, Newton and Kepler who described the true nature of the heavens and then at the turn of this century the seismologist Richard Oldham mapped out the earth's crust, mantle and core. Since then we have learned from Hubble, Hoyle and others that we live on an unremarkable planet around a fairly average star on the rim of one of millions of galaxies that constitute our known Universe, of which there may be several if not many more. All this knowledge must change how we believe in God and Christ Himself. These changes in no way threaten the biblical witness and the Church's teaching; they reinforce it.

If our notion of God has got rather "provincial" then the Scriptures paint quite a different picture. God is the Lord of the whole Universe, not just the earth. Christ came to gather all things heavenly and earthly together in Himself, expressing that unity and fullness in His Body, the Church. It is Ephesians

especially that we have this exalted picture of Christ the Lord of the Universe, the Pantokrator who unites the whole Universe to God in Himself. Again in these references, note the use of the term "fullness," both in relation to time and space. The Incarnation touches on both dimensional realities:-

"... in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him. [1:10] ...

"... He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all." [1:22-23]

So, our Lord who is the King of the Cosmos came down to this earth, in this solar system, in this galaxy, in this Universe in the form of the most highly developed creature that His hand-guided evolutionary process had created, Man. He came from this exalted infinity to this lowly finitude out of sheer love, to lift humanity out of death into the fullness of his divine life. We are therefore called to a witness not just before our peers on this earth but outward and onward to the stars, preaching the same gospel.

I have no doubt that in the next Millennium we shall make first contact with many alien species. I suspect that when we do make that first contact and when we share with our heavenly visitors the gospel that we have received, our message will not be entirely surprising to them or unheard of. Maybe they will have already had a divine visitation from the Word in their own creaturely form. Maybe they with us will be part of one even greater Church that recognises the Light that enlightens not only all men but also all sentient life. I am quite excited about that prospect although I shall not probably live to see it.

A poet called Alice Meynell has captured this vision well in her poem: "Christ in the Universe."

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

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

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

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

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

**But, in the eternities,
Doubtless we shall compare together, hear**

**A million alien gospels, in what guise
He trod the Pleiades, the Lyre, the Bear.**

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

Our theology of the Incarnation has to match this grander vision or I suspect an impoverished provincial Christianity will miss God's moment for the whole Universe and not just for our earth. His coming to earth has a purpose for the whole of creation and not just for this world. The amazing thing is that us poor little creatures, great in destiny in His eyes, are part of that purpose!

Fr Gregory

Fulness of Time

"But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law to redeem those that were under the Law that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)

Many are much pre-occupied at the end of this year with "time." However, mostly this is mere chronology, the coming round of an inexact date when the earth will have come to the same point in its orbit round the sun for the 2000th time. We say "inexact" because, of course, the Millennium doesn't start for another year yet, the beginning of the First Millennium being recorded as 1 A.D. from the date of Christ's birth. Now, we mustn't be churlish about this. People want to celebrate. That's OK. But, it's not our time scale; it's not our celebration. For us the celebration is always of the *right time*, God's time, the fullness of time, when God's sent his Son to earth for our salvation.

It was the right time, God's *kairos*, in respect of what had gone before, the time of preparation and expectancy. The Jewish messianic hope had for centuries focused on the One who was to come and cleanse the Temple, to set Israel free, to establish God's kingdom reign in justice and peace. We cannot say that most if not all Jews expected God-in-the-flesh, although Isaiah's prophecy of Emmanuel, God-with-us, was to find a resonance in the hearts and lives of those who had met Christ and found him to be such.

Jesus, therefore, came to judge the minds and hearts of many. Some accepted Him as their Lord-in-the-flesh and became children of God. Others rejected Him and unwittingly also became instruments of God's purpose in establishing His Kingdom and His Church through the Crucified and Risen Lord. So, it was truly the fullness of time because a woman, the Theotokos, had been prepared to receive the Word and that Word lost nothing in establishing His reign. Even death itself was to surrender, vanquished, into the new life of the resurrection.

This fullness of time does not just stretch forward to Christ's birth; it also stretches forward from Christ's birth to each and every one of us right now here in this place. He was born in the fullness of God's time, *and* in ours, so that we might be reborn in Him. In other words, God has a time for each one of us, in this life, when He comes and desires admittance to our hearts and lives. If we are so pre-occupied with the passage of mere time, Milleniums-'n-things, we may miss the *kairos* time when the Holy Spirit visits us enquiring to be admitted. He will not force His way in. He will wait upon our word of acceptance; just like our Lady: *"be it unto me according to Thy Word."*

I think that many of us are secretly nervous about this acceptance on account of what it will involve. If the Holy Spirit gains admittance into our lives, fully and without let or hindrance, then we know that we

shall have to change inside out. There will be many things of which to repent and new priorities in our lives, there will be new attitudes and relationships to forge and more especially with our enemies as well as our friends. We shall have to get used to living our lives by faith and not sight. We shall have to take God at His Word and surrender our familiar anxieties for the liberating wide open road of His Love in which only the next step counts toward the heavenly goal. How much better though to live in the freedom of kairos time than the pinched and narrowing perspective of a chronology which inevitably descends into infirmity and death!

All it takes to choose aright is a trust in the Unseen Hand and the courage and idealism which goes with this faith. As we step out into a new Millennium we shall tread surely and with confidence in God. The celebration won't pall for us with any 2nd January hangover. It is an eternal feast in the heavens of the reborn who will never die. It is a Eucharist of eternal joy. It is a message of the angels, the adoration of truly wise men, the humility and love of the little folk of God. Brothers and sisters, let us have time for such things: God's time.

Fr. Gregory

An Apple a Day?

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away," apparently. Without doubt, public health is a "good thing." It has been the basis of the National Health Service in Britain since the last War and it has greatly enriched and extended the lives of millions. However, every apple, no matter how good, can turn rotten. Some are now thinking that the worms are indeed munching away and the fruit does taste rather sour. The catalogue of woes over the last two months is really quite dire.

- Britain spends much less than the average of EU countries on health. Our Prime Minister "aspires" to improve this.
- During the flu epidemic over Christmas, some patients had to be transported over a number of counties to find beds.
- Needful but expensive treatments are being increasingly rationed.
- Negligence seems more prevalent ... two patients' legs have been needlessly amputated and another poor soul had the wrong kidney removed ... at 69 he stands little chance of a transplant
- Supervision seems woefully lax ... Britain's most notorious serial killer, a doctor who killed 15 patients and is widely suspected of murdering 100 more with 1000 cases undetermined, managed to stockpile a morphine derivative for some time without being caught.

This is more than just "bad luck" a statistical glitch. It suggests that the public ethos of our common health is being undermined as management replaces service. If health professionals are continually worrying about money and costs, they will have less energy to direct towards healing. It is a common place to hear politicians saying "you can't just throw money at it!" True, but if the Health Service continues to be starved of tax revenue, "efficiency" may soon begin to look like a higher death rate in the system. Already the signs are there that public opinion is beginning to turn on this one; but will it be prepared to pay the price?

Fr Gregory

Practical Holiness

Jesus has shown us what we must do to grow in holiness within the life of the Church :-

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)

So, our hearts must be purified if we are to see God. Purifying the heart is a battlefield: the prize, our salvation; the Captain of our faith, Jesus Christ; our Adversary, the devil and his minions; God's army, the angels and holy ones; the combatants, you and me; the field of engagement, the heart. This interior battle, always being waged in our hearts, is for the restoration of our likeness unto God once sullied by the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve. This restoration, this purity of heart, is not achieved without struggle. It involves a voluntary submission to the suffering that arises both from the heat of the battle and the intransigence of our old nature. It requires a profound humility in the context of the utter futility of attempting to fight in our own strength and an obedient disposition towards God who knows full well what we need to make progress. As St. Paul teaches in his Epistle to the Ephesians: -

10 Brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

The devil is only permitted to use the raw material of our ungodly desires reinforced by our passions and since he is an immaterial entity, he can only work through our thoughts. None of us can stop evil thoughts battering on the walls of our hearts. This is the legacy of the Fall. The great St. Antony of the Desert taught that we must expect temptations until our last breath! Our intellect, though, is like the guardian, the doorkeeper to the heart. If it is alert and functioning normally within the graceful and tranquil union of the soul and God, it will be able to sense the approach of evil and defend the heart from demonic assault. This defence is effected through the invocation of God's help in prayer and the courageous and energetic renunciation of the evil. If it is sleepy, self indulgent or compromised by self-reliance and unbelief, the heart will

barely be able to resist the swarm of evil thoughts and indeed may be overcome if the mind entertains them and consents through the will to their enactment. Only when the intellect has been strengthened through a humble disposition toward God can it readily descend into the heart and fortify the soul against the fiery darts of the evil one. This is the active character of our faith; not a dry and dusty theoretical abstraction but a fight to the death with all that opposes God, consciously and unconsciously within each one of us. In this combat we may only safely use God's resources or else we shall fail, disastrously. Again we hear from St. Paul: -

13 Therefore, take the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; 16 besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ...

This counsel speaks for itself. The Christian soul cannot be indifferent to the Scriptures, faith, godliness, asceticism and prayer if it is to prevail and be accounted worthy of a heavenly crown. Much will be made of these resources in forthcoming talks. For now, let us consider one aspect of prayer that is particularly necessary in the attentive guarding of the heart from evil and the cultivation in obedience and humility of the virtues. St. Paul says: *"Pray at all times ..."* (v18). He means of course, the Prayer of the Heart, the Jesus Prayer or some similar gospel prayer which can embed itself in the heart and by the grace and operation of the Holy Spirit say itself when needed. Of course, it takes much love and hard work to get this prayer established in our heart, but when it has taken root it can be a marvellous way for the Lord to protect us from all evil and sow in us the seeds of the mustard tree, the branches of which stretch to heaven itself. So let us take every opportunity to plant this prayer in our hearts with due consideration to each word and its promise for our lives.

If, as a faithful soldier and servant of the Lord we fight this good fight using his armoury, then we shall find, progressively, maybe over a long time, that our heart has been purified. With that purity comes clear sight, the divine vision, bliss as our humanity is taken up into God and made radiant in His Love. Then we shall shine like the stars, not with our own intrinsic light but with the transfiguring light of God Himself. Truly the saints lighten us on our way. Cannot we in some measure be an unclouded lamp for others? Of course we can but only insofar as we are ready in the Spirit to die daily to self and live only for Christ. Let us never fail then in taking up this blessed cross, Amen.

Therapy for Soul and Body

What amazes me about the Orthodox Church is the sheer amount of help and support which is available to all of us along the way to assist in our struggle against the devil. The place to start always, is with the Church herself. One oft-quoted saying reminds us that it is not possible to be a Christian outside the Church. Inside there is help, support, comfort and sustenance. This truth is beautifully illustrated by a word much used in the early Church, the Greek word "koinonia" which can be translated as "communion" and also "community". It is by the act of communion, by breaking the bread inside the community, that the Church is nourished and grows. The Church is koinonia, is communion; community; Eucharist and inside that community we can find all the help we need.

Whereabouts? Leaving aside for the moment the ministry of bishop, priest and deacon, we can find help at the bottom-most rung by supporting one another in our daily living in the Church. One step up the ladder, is to find someone in the community in whom we can confide and who will confide in you. Mutual support of this kind -- talking through our difficulties/likes/dislikes/problems of faith as well as problems of life -- a soul friend of this kind is invaluable and the kind of help we all need.

But a soul-friend is not to be confused with the next step up the ladder -- a spiritual director who will advise us on the way ahead in our spiritual journey. This role may, or may-not, be combined with that of a confessor. It is, in fact, quite common for Orthodox to have a nun as their spiritual director and this, of course, necessitates showing yourself to the priest for confession. Whichever way we choose, inside the koinonia of the Church, there is no sense in which we walk alone. Equally, there is no sense in waiting for someone to come along and say "I'm going to be your soul-friend": we have to go out and choose one for ourselves.

Confession has already been mentioned, and this is, really, the key to the future as far as progress in the spiritual life is concerned, and towards purity of heart. This is the first stage in the process of deification, i.e. participating in the Life of God. We are fortunate here because our Church is not legalistic in her approach to this Sacrament, like the Western Churches, but there is also a sense in which she is more strict. People ask, why is confession central and so important? The short answer is, because sin is central in all our lives and so, confession is vital for dealing with it.

St. John dealt with this in his letter and I just quote him: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, Christ is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say, we have not sinned, we make him a liar and His word is not in us" (I John 1.18).

The Church sticks to this strict teaching and believes that only God can forgive sins, but that He does so through Christ in the Church. There are, of course, conditions and these are:-- genuine repentance and the intention to change. Both of these are evidenced by the act of confession which is usually made in public, although the words spoken are heard only by the priest who then, acting on behalf of both Christ and His Church, offers advice and the assurance of forgiveness.

We are all sinners, and in the life of the Christian we all need forgiveness. We are also, all sick people and need healing of body, mind and soul if we are to come to the fullness of which St. Paul speaks.

Jesus Christ came to "bear the infirmities" of all of us, and one sign of His Messiahship was to heal the sick. The power of healing remains in the Church since Christ Himself remains in the Church through the Holy Spirit.

"Is any among you sick?" St. James asks - "let him call for the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5.14-16).

Fr. John-Mark

Free to Choose

Our society and culture lays great importance the individual's right of self determination. Freedom of choice is the hallmark of western secular pluralist democratic societies. There is no doubt that such freedom is a fine thing and there are many in the world today who are even shedding their blood to achieve such freedom for themselves and their children. However, freedom of choice can never be the last word in any society. Restraint against criminal or anti-social behaviour is a necessary curtailment of our individual liberty. The law defines the necessary boundaries and the judiciary and the police enforce the same. There are two contemporary developments in western culture, however, which have pushed Christianity further and further to the margins not only of public life but private life as well.

The first is the idea that the law and the law alone defines what is acceptable and good, distinguishing it from that which is reprehensible and evil. Moreover it is the law enforcement agencies who are the negative guardians of society's values, educators and social workers the positive social engineers who are believed capable of delivering them. In so far as the Church and the clergy come into this equation at all, it is merely to set moral markers for believers themselves. Most secular moralists look with deep antagonism on any attempt by the faith communities, (not just the churches), to extend spiritual values beyond the church, the synagogue, the mosque and the temple.

And so we have the first error, that secular law is the only arbiter between good and evil. That there is a higher law than this, the Law of God, doesn't get a look in. Here, of course, secular moralists are in a bit of a bind. It is also a common place that there are supposed to be no absolute moral values. The laws of each country are thought, in large degree, to be dependent on each culture with only certain core values embraced by all. When pressed, however, to state what these core values are, secular moralists either fall back on a politically correct creed, (itself permeated through and through with relativism), or merely shrug and offer bland platitudes, the ideal fodder for politicians, spin doctors and sound bytes. Very quickly it appears that there exists only the most insubstantial of foundations for a secular morality. Only a fleeting secular smile is left from the facing of the disappearing religious Cheshire cat.

The second error is in the notion that freedom of choice is simply a good thing because people, given the right information, will choose the right option. So, sex and drugs education in schools largely consists of giving young people the facts. Educators rarely dare to enter the "Thou shalt" and the "Thou shalt not" doors. The only change recently in the UK has been the Government's decision to require teachers to encourage children to avoid premature sexual experience. The idea that choices might be better aligned to objective moral standards is left in the educational sphere to the lonely voice of the Chief Inspector for Schools, Chris Woodhead, widely excoriated by the rest of the teaching profession for this and his other views.

The root of this problem is the confusion of "freedom of choice" with "freedom to choose." If we are not free to choose, freedom of choice is an illusion. It is like the drug abuser who complains that he can handle it when he can't. Moreover, even when we have achieved the freedom to choose by the

regenerative power of God in our lives, subsequent choices only have value if they follow the natural law or the divine law. The almost complete absence of an acceptance and discussion of these issues in the public domain leaves our public morality fatally flawed, post-Christian and dangerously exposed. The rising tide of selfishness and lawlessness in our culture shows no sign at present in breaking through the facile optimism of those whose creed is humanism and whose inner life lacks any direction save their own. Freedom to choose comes from knowing the truth that sets us free. That truth is the Gospel of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Fr. Gregory

Spiritual Combat

by Fr. Gregory

There is a city in the centre of every living person and that is the heart. There is only one ruler possible in this city. Pray that it be Christ.. At baptism the Spirit becomes the life of a Christian as Christ takes his rightful place in the heart of the believer. However, the Christian also has a vital role to play in extending God's rule and sovereignty into every nook and cranny of his life. This will involve the repulsion of all the enemies of God as they seek to storm the citadel of the heart. This is of the essence of spiritual warfare ... a contest and an arena in which every Christian must engage with God's strength and grace until God is "all in all."

God provides ample resources of grace by the operation of his Spirit within our hearts so that we might prove victorious in this battle. When we fall he raises us up again through repentance with forgiveness. When we lack wisdom in fighting he provides us with godly counsel, often through the guidance of a spiritual father or mother. When we flag in energy or zeal he calls to our mind the goal of the Kingdom and the dangers of falling short through lethargy or despair. When we grow angry or frustrated through excess he chastens us lovingly by showing us our weakness. He then opens again the door to His compassion and strength, which is our humility. Also, as an abiding help in the Tradition of the Church he provides three great weapons, prayer, watchfulness and fasting.

"Watch and pray!" Christ commanded his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:38). Both these injunctions go together as surely as do fasting and prayer. It is watchful prayer that keeps the heart steadfast and safe against the encroachment of all its enemies.

All the ascetic fathers stress the importance of guarding the heart in watchful prayer. The city's walls are not safe unless they watched over and guarded. Practically this means an alert and continuous prayerfulness, (even when not praying mentally in the obvious sense), so that the mind may easily detect any disturbance of the soul. These disturbances may arise either from the full frontal assault of a temptation or the more subtle machinations of the Evil One. Even good and holy inclinations may mask a corrupt intention or a self-seeking mentality. Such watchfulness must not, however, lead to introspection, a certain obsession with one's inner state. Always the heart must look outward and upward toward the hills "from whence cometh my help" (Psalm 121:1). So, we must always "watch and pray."

On a number of occasions our Lord linked fasting and prayer, notably when the disciples' ministry had proved fruitless by prayer alone (Mark 9:29). Fasting clearly has an effect on our prayer. We may surmise that prayer is much more effective when the stomach is not overfull, but there is a more to fasting than praying "lite." Fasting is a physical discipline that has a corresponding mental component, self restraint. The vessel that prays must pray not only with right intention but also with clean hands. Such power in prayer comes from a disciplined heart, a heart that is not full of itself but full of God. As St. James reminds us ... "the prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." (James 5:16)

Fasting curbs our self will. It strengthens our will to serve God the Word who nourishes us more deeply than bread alone.

Thus girded with spiritual armour for our spiritual combat, we sometimes wonder why God allows us to suffer afflictions, trials, temptations and the seeming intractability of our own nature. Such questions have often been in the minds of believers in all ages.

In the New Testament we have a direct answer to the question given to us by St. Peter in his First Letter which is essentially teaching given to those preparing for baptism. He reminds the candidates: "... you may have to suffer various trials so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:6-7)

So then, there we have it. We necessarily engage in spiritual warfare as a test and strengthening of our faith with the goal of salvation and the glorification of God. Nothing could be more important than this, so let us gird ourselves with God's strength for the forthcoming struggle of Great Lent and the ongoing struggle for the pre-eminence of God and His Kingdom in our hearts and lives.

Living the Paschal Victory

What happens when we truly believe in the Resurrection according to the Scriptures ...

There is no fear of death

This is an unholy fear born out of the consciousness of our sin, our nakedness, the poverty of our mortal nature apart from God. When we believe in the resurrection we know that death has no more dominion over us. The long reign of sin is ended by virtue of the Father's grace and mercy and, moreover, by the power of the Holy Spirit in disarming death and granting us eternal life, incorporate in the Body of the Risen Lord, (which is the Church). This makes the Christian life a victorious and vigorous calling. We can do anything for God, knowing that whether we live or die, we belong to Him and He will bring us home to His Kingdom provided that we persevere to the end.

There is nothing to harm us

Christ being Risen has conquered utterly all opposing powers; He has stripped them and lead them captive in his victory procession. The faithfulness and power of God manifest by the Spirit in His Son urges to take hold of His promises and believe that in Him is our life and nothing will harm us so long as we take this to be the rock of our faith within the Church whose gates are firmly closed to hell. The Christian life is, therefore, one of great adventure and daring provided that we trust in Him, obey His commandments and stay resolutely within His all-protecting Body, the Church, the Ark of Salvation. In this endeavour the most Holy Mother of God is always there for us, urging our closer walk with God and nurturing within us a deeper obedience to the will of Her Son.

Life makes sense

This generation has disbelieved itself into the absurdity of life without God. In a recent documentary, Peter France recounted his journey into Orthodoxy by exposing ruthlessly his own logic about life before he entered the Church. As soon as life ceases to be useful, he once believed, it is better to end it oneself. "Useful" in his context meant making an intellectual contribution to society. It could easily have defined by anyone else on any other grounds. What is common to the godless notion of life is its utter futility. Because the eyes have been darkened to the true life of Man, (which is God), modern secular people face only the absurdity of death or the mad dash for one's own interests and pleasures.

Hedonism or despair await those without the Kingdom. True life, a full life, a purposeful life is only to be found in the God who raises from the dead all those who call upon Him in faith.

This is truly good!

God created the world and called it *good*. How is it then that even some who call themselves Christians can support abortion, defend the indefensible in war, rape the environment, call for consensual euthanasia or attempt to "improve" life through genetic engineering? Still others despise the body by abusing themselves or abusing others through drugs, fornication or violence. Some, less spectacularly, perhaps consign the body to the waste bin of history through spiritualism, the occult, New Age or reincarnation.

What all these heresies deny is the fundamental goodness of the body, the created order and all living things. In some sort of "super-spiritual" state the peddlers of this deadliness justify their beliefs by pointing away from this world to somewhere else. But Christ came to save this world, to renew its potential to give glory to God by delivering the material realm from its slavery to death. The resurrection of the *body*, is, therefore, a subversion of all attempts to reduce the scope of our salvation in Christ, and, thereby, introduce new (and some not-so-new) evils by the back door. In that Christ was raised from the tomb, *bodily*, the whole Universe as well as our bodies will be glorified in the New Creation which is the Kingdom of God.

We are not talking to ourselves!

Finally, and on a personal note, Christ, being raised means that we are not "talking to ourselves." For the last two thousand years Orthodox Christians, (and, no doubt others without opportunity to join the Church), have lived and died for the sake of the Son of God who was born lived, died and was raised from the dead for them. In this we have been utterly right or irrevocably mad. When we love and serve the Saviour we are in a personal and communal relationship with the Living One, not a figment of our imaginations but a real flesh and blood relationship with Christ, kindled by the Spirit and serving the God whom we invoke as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The resurrection of Christ makes all this possible. As St. Paul said, if Christ has not been raised, then we are of all men most to be pitied. Pity us not! As it is, Christ lives, He dies no more, and we live now and shall live for ever in Him!

Fr Gregory

An account by Marcus Plested of the Turin conference

'Orthodoxy and the Future of Europe'

This impressive conference took place in Turin between the 28th and 29th February under the auspices of the Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli.

It aimed to examine the place of the Orthodox tradition within modern Europe, particularly its potential role within the context of the expansion of the European Union. In other words, to consider the question whether Orthodoxy might indeed be able to contribute towards the building of a common European identity. This is by no means an empty question.

Many Orthodox believe the structures and even the very idea of the EU to be inimical to the Orthodox tradition. Equally there are many within the EU who subscribe to the remark of the Austrian foreign minister that 'Europe stops where Orthodoxy begins'. I shall give in what follows a sketch of some of the main contributions made in the course of the conference.

Metropolitan Kyril of Smolensk, President of the Department of External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, gave a very searching account of the tension between traditional and liberal values in the modern globalised society. In particular, he stressed that the future of Christianity will be determined by its ability to remain at the heart of human existence -- to be not merely a private affair, such as it is permitted to be in the modern liberal mindset, but a way of life. One cannot be a Christian in isolation, in one's spare time. Christianity must be all-inclusive, embracing all aspects of life and rooted in tradition.

While not subscribing to any kind of anathematisation of change per se, Metropolitan Kyril insisted that, for the Orthodox, the tradition of the Church, its living apostolic witness, must be regarded as normative. Deviations from the tradition are violations of the rule of faith and can therefore be regarded as heresy. Of course the only way to grasp the nature of the tradition is to consciously live the life of the Church. Such an existence necessarily entails the rejection of the liberal understanding of human freedom, the idea that man must be liberated as he is, in his sinful, fallen condition. Such an understanding is, in essence, a particularly vicious form of anthropolatry. True freedom, according to the tradition, is liberation from sin -- something that can only be achieved by, and in communion with, God. Metropolitan Kyril thus indicated very clearly the tension between the values of traditional Orthodoxy and those of liberal humanism.

Metropolitan Kyril went on to consider what approach the Russian Church should take in the face of globalisation and European expansion. He rejected the isolationist model, an approach that would condemn Russia to a kind of national-religious ghetto and, in effect, betray its missionary duty, its obligation to witness to the truth. He equally rejected the wholesale transplantation of the Western liberal model to Russia, a scenario that would imply the obsolescence of the domestic tradition and again see Orthodoxy restricted to a kind of native reservation. His own 'third way' (excuse the cliché!) would be to recognise the value of liberal economic and political structures, and indeed of the beneficial value of liberal humanism in the field of international relations, but to reject liberalism outright on the moral level. The Church, he continued, has a duty to affirm traditional Christian values and to involve itself in all aspects of life. It must try to embody the tradition in the modern world, to give answers to today's problems. It should, in particular, address the issues of Church-State relations, nationalism, the economy, the ecological crisis, feminism, sexual minorities, the family, and bioethics. Many of these issues could scarcely have occurred to the Church Fathers.

The Church has a formidable task before it -- to produce an authentically Christian response to the challenges of the modern world, to 'manifest itself in life'. It should not be afraid of the West, or indeed of other religious traditions. The West, for its part, must recognise that its values are not universal values and accept the diversity of the traditions that have gone into the shaping of Europe. Only through such an advance in mutual understanding can the notion of a 'common European identity' have any meaning or value.

The question of Church-State relations was also addressed by Andrej Zubov of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Zubov underlined the breakdown in society caused by the communist dictatorship, a breakdown from which Russia was only slowly, if at all, recovering. He outlined some of the aspects of the interplay between Church and State in recent years: the Patriarch's blessing of Vladimir Putin as he took office as Prime Minister; the Patriarch's de facto third place in the state hierarchy; the use of Orthodox standards by the army and navy; the presence of icons in government offices. All this is strictly non-constitutional, but appeals to the fundamentally religious sentiments of the Russian people. Zubov had few suggestions to make as to the possible regularisation of the place of the Church in the modern Russian polity. He did tentatively, and perhaps naively, suggest England as a possible model of a country with an established Church that was neither exclusive nor state-building.

Ivan Dimitrov of the University of Sophia spoke of the parlous situation of the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria -- seriously undermanned, poorly attended, weakened by internal schism and faced with a relentlessly secular government. The situation in Romania, as presented by Metropolitan Daniel of Moldavia and Bukovina, was rather better.

Despite its many socio-economic problems, Romania remains one of the most religious countries in Europe, proud of its long Christian history and of its fusion of Latin and Byzantine orthodox traditions. Outlining the tasks of the Church in the years ahead, Metropolitan Daniel spoke of the need to overcome the separation between faith and culture brutally imposed by the communist state. Sacred art can, he argued, help bridge this gap, becoming a focal point of creative theological endeavour. As an example he cited the cultural and theological universe expressed by the synthesis of Byzantine and Gothic traditions in the churches of Moldavia. The Church must also rediscover the link between philanthropy and spirituality, to recover a sense of the presence of Christ not only in the liturgy but also in all those who suffer. Like Metropolitan Kyril, he emphasised the cardinal importance of the social programme of the Church. Metropolitan Daniel went on to stress the need to unite freedom to responsibility. Decades of submission to the structures of the communist state have left many in Eastern Europe ill-equipped to deal with the new freedoms and uncertainties of life in a liberal-capitalist society. Equally, the western model has not been able to instil a sense of civic, let alone, moral responsibility into the populace at large. The Church can certainly help underline the intimate link between freedom and responsibility in all aspects of human life.

The Church must also work out the place of Christian spiritual and moral teaching within the modern process of globalisation -- no easy task. Similarly, she must affirm the values of sanctity against those of secularism. To do so, she must acknowledge her responsibility for contemporary secularism -- something that will require a real spirit of repentance. Metropolitan Daniel noted that the experience of the Church at the hands of the militant atheists has been an experience not only of the Cross but also of the Resurrection. It is only this kind of re-birth that can enable the Church to fully overcome the communist era and to pave the way for a process of re-evangelisation. Europe needs a soul and only Christ can be that soul. Christians of all denominations must therefore struggle to provide a common witness to Christ, co-operating at every level of their ministry. The Romanian Church for one is committed to achieving such a common witness.

The focus then moved to the Serbian Church. Metropolitan Amphilohije of Montenegro gave a historical survey of the Serbian Church, stressing the organic relationship that has existed between Church and nation from the Battle of Kosovo (1389) onwards. This closeness has, he noted, placed the Church at risk of being used for merely political ends notwithstanding the condemnation of Philetism in 1872. This kind of confusion must be acknowledged as having contributed in some way to the anti-Christian revolutions of the C20. Metropolitan Amphilohije went on to speak of the creation of the Yugoslav state, the re-establishment of the patriachate and the bloody events of the Second World War. The tensions of the war years were, he reminded us, never resolved during the decades of communism and consequently erupted with re-doubled ferocity following the collapse of that system. The recent Kosovo campaign, he stressed, is a cause for shame not only for NATO but also for the government of Serbia and much of the Albanian population. The savagery unleashed by this campaign has caused horrific and almost unprecedented destruction, particularly of churches and monasteries, in full view of the international community. One must ask, Metropolitan Amphilohije asserted, to what extent this destruction has been begotten by the triple marriage of Islamic fundamentalism, modern liberalism and post-totalitarianism -- united with the aim of destroying the Church. In this respect the crucifixion of the Serbian Orthodox Church in our time must be seen as having universal Christian relevance.

The situation of Orthodoxy in modern Greece was addressed by Vasilios Makrides, of the University of Erfurt. Like Serbia, Greece suffers from the confusion of Church and nation consequent upon the eclipse of Byzantine universalism. The Church and the State are intimately connected in Greece -- more so than in virtually any other Orthodox country. The State pays the clergy, the Church participates in all State ceremonies, religious education is compulsory, and proselytism is forbidden. Even PASOK, the Socialist Party, has abandoned its commitment to the separation of Church and State. The Church is, in fact, a monopoly -- even the Roman Catholic Church is not a legal entity in Greece. This is of course a situation which will have to change in time -- Greece has been repeatedly condemned by European bodies such as the Court of Human Rights for its failure to respect the rights of minority religious groups. Much has also changed with the accession of the new Archbishop, Christodoulos, who has very clearly stated his attention to bring the Church to the very heart of the life of the country and is

more than ready to express his opinion on all issues affecting modern Greek society. All this in marked contrast to his predecessor, Archbishop Seraphim. Christodoulos is enormously popular in Greece, more so than any politician. One should not, however, assume, that the Church of Greece is without its problems. While there is certainly a 'diffused religiosity' in the Greek people, this does not necessarily go much deeper than a nostalgia for ritual forms or a sense that to be Greek is to be Orthodox never mind if one happens to be an atheist. Greece in fact has a lower regular Church attendance than Italy, Spain or Portugal -- even if its ratio of civil to church weddings is the lowest in Europe. Greece also faces the problem of Orthodox fundamentalism, witnessed, for example, by the zealots of Athos and the 'neo-Orthodoxy' of intellectual circles of the 1980's. The Church of Greece must also work out its attitude to the EU and seek to resolve, in co-operation with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the thorny problem of the Greek diaspora. As for its relations with the Greek State, Makrides concluded by suggesting not a divorce but a kind of partial separation -- living together but no longer sharing the same bed.

Father Boris Bobrinskoy, Dean of the Institut St-Serge in Paris, spoke of the diaspora as a possible 'bridge' between Eastern and Western Europe. He outlined the history of the Russian diaspora in Europe: the role of the Institut St-Serge, the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, the *Fraternité Orthodoxe* and inter-episcopal assembly in France. The establishment of a vibrant Orthodox presence in Western Europe reminds us that Orthodoxy is the heritage not of the East alone but of all Christianity. Orthodoxy has, however, tended to define itself by opposition to the West. It must cease to be so defensive, and open itself to towards dialogue, to an experience of Pentecost. It must witness to the crucified Lord in the time and culture in which it finds itself. To do so it requires a creative faithfulness to tradition, a faithfulness that will allow it to impart its rich spiritual patrimony to the Church at large. The possibilities opened up by the diaspora are not accidental but rather the work of Christ the master of history -- as Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia has often said. The Church lives in a kind of double existence -- both by the 'waters of Babylon' and already tasting the Kingdom. We are, he concluded, called to live in the world without being of the world.

The closing session of the conference was also one of the most lively. It began with an analysis by Christos Yannaras of the roots of the Schism between East and West. Yannaras began by considering differing understandings of catholicity in East and West: the East seeing each eucharistic community, gathered around its bishop, as the manifestation of the Church in its wholeness; the West defining catholicity in juridical and geographical terms -- Augustine being the chief villain of the piece.

In the former interpretation the Church is a mode of divine existence in which we participate; in the latter it is a merely human construct. Yannaras also stressed the East's refusal to exhaust the truth in formulations -- in other words its apophaticism. Again this is linked to the experience of Truth by participation. Yannaras went on to consider the historical circumstances of the Schism, in particular the impact of the alternative Christian Empire of the Franks. He spoke of the gradual entrenchment of the Schism through the Crusades and the Renaissance, noting the development of an inferiority complex amongst the Orthodox, to such a degree that they can blithely accept the Western devaluation of 'Byzantium', as perpetrated by Gibbon, Montesquieu, Voltaire *et alii*. Contemporary Orthodoxy has only a very secondary place in the Western mindset (the mindset with which many Orthodox are also afflicted) -- at best admired for its 'mysticism'. Yannaras ended on a somewhat pessimistic note - given that the Christian tradition now occupies such a peripheral place within society, it is very difficult to see how the Churches are really going to contribute anything of substance to the formation of a united Europe.

Thomas Pidlík, of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, gave a modest but perceptive paper on the progressive estrangement of Orthodox and 'Catholic-Protestant-Enlightenment' Europe. He criticised the tendency to propound simplistic juxtapositions between East and West, for example Lossky's contrast of the 'life in Christ' of the East and the 'imitation of Christ' of the West. Surely, as St Nicholas Cabasilas points out, the one invites the other. pidlík also had some useful things to say on the subject of Sophiology, stressing its poetic quality. Sophia should not be dogmatised or materialised. Its primary function is as a symbol of the supreme beauty that is Christ. This thought led pidlík to call for an

'encounter of beauty' between East and West (as Metropolitan Daniel had done). Such an encounter might itself be said to be symbolised in a Vatican chapel dedicated to Ss. John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas. Since they certainly get along in heaven, observed pidlík, let us hope we can do the same on earth!

Hervé Legrand, of the Institut Catholique in Paris was then called on to give a response to the two papers. He said a few words about pidlík's paper and then turned to that of Yannaras. He began with some very warm remarks about his 'dear friend' Yannaras, at which point it was very clear that he was about to launch into a severe critique. This duly followed. Legrand objected to the unhistorical nature of Yannaras' presentation, for instance the assertion that Augustine knew no Greek and was consequently unable to assimilate the riches of the Hellenic tradition. Legrand pointed out, quite rightly, that Augustine did know Greek, although he tended to exaggerate the extent of that knowledge.

He also queried Yannaras' thoughts on catholicity, arguing that the 'geographical' element of catholicity had its roots not so much in Roman Law as in Scripture -- see the Saviour's injunction at the close of the Gospel of Matthew. The title 'Roman Catholic Church' is, he somewhat disingenuously added, not an auto-characterisation, but rather a Protestant designation; it cannot, therefore, be used as evidence of a given notion of catholicity. Legrand virtually derided Yannaras' sub-Romanidesian interpretation of history and put forward a rather more optimistic view of the future, citing the very positive developments witnessed in the Balamand statement. He ended by somewhat mischievously thanking Yannaras for the 'radicalism' of his presentation.

Yannaras had a brief opportunity to respond to all this. With some justice, he accused Legrand of a *reductio ad absurdum* and of failing to really address the key, existential, issues: the nature of truth, the origins of atheism, the lure of the consumer society and so forth. We must, he argued, look for unity in a shared experience of Truth himself -- only then can death be truly vanquished by love.

Legrand then took the floor for his own paper. Here he spoke the theologian as mediator and as one of the three poles, with the episcopate and popular piety, of the Church's self-expression. Differing traditions and schools of thought should not, he argued, detract from the unity we must strive to share -- see the example of the distinct but not contradictory Alexandrine and Antiochene traditions in the East. We must recognise differing modes of expression and spheres of expertise and not let essentially cultural differences become dogmatic divisions. Above all, we must understand one another, and we can only understand one another in a spirit of love and not of confrontation. We should recognise that our problems - autocephaly, secularisation and so on - are substantially the same and should be approached in a spirit of unity. Only if mutual confidence and trust is restored can the Catholic and Orthodox traditions bear, in the words of the Balamand statement, the responsibility they share before God for the faithful of the earth.

Mission Challenge

From Fr. Gregory

One of the things that concerns us all in the Deanery is mission. It seems appropriate as we approach Pentecost, the feast of mission *par excellence* that we consider afresh the calling of the Church to make Christ known to anyone who will hear. A little while ago Nicholas McNeish told me that he wanted to write an article on Mission which was a great burden on his heart. I readily agreed, sharing the same convictions. Nicholas has written this primarily from his experience in predominantly "ethnic" (for want of a better word) communities which have not always had a very strong sense of Mission to the British, (as we have).

We should not, however, let this blind us to the dangers of thinking that Orthodoxy is *for us* and the few other people who might like to *tag along*. Orthodoxy is the Gospel, and as such, it is for all. If reading this

article prompts us personally and collectively into action to witness to our neighbours, family and friends ... all well and good. In this, Nicholas will have done us all a service!

Mission Challenge

by Nicholas McNeish

I have been minded for some time to put pen to paper on a subject close to my heart and one which I think is a challenge to the Orthodox Church in these islands. I am trying to tackle what I see as a failing and shortcoming that exists in the Church to which I belong. This is not out of a sense of trying as they say to "teach my Granny how to suck eggs," least of all from any theological stance, but rather out of the love I have for my faith. I desire and long that it be easily available and understandable so that all might be able to share it because I believe my Church to be a very scriptural but traditional Church with much to offer to the world.

I am sure that the Orthodox Church is seen by the general body of people to be a sectarian body, closed off from the British people by language and obscure rituals. When a person is baptised and chrismated into the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and confirmed in the Orthodox Faith, they are not becoming a Greek, Serbian, Russian or Ukrainian Christian, but an Orthodox Christian and to attach labels to the Faith, does not serve it well and does it an actual disservice. Since we are a hierarchical Church, we promise at our reception fidelity to a rightly appointed Orthodox bishop but for all that we remain Orthodox Christians.

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ sent His Apostles out into the world to all men, nationalities and creeds, as chronicled in the Gospels and after the Apostles received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they set out on a mission to evangelise the then known world. They spoke to people in their own tongues; they were not afraid to meet the many challenges and vicissitudes that the world was to subject them to a world that was cruel and depraved.

For me, this poses the question, if we who also possess this gift, given at our baptism and chrismation cannot rise to a similar challenge within our own time and age, are we not failing Our Lord, Church and Faith? When the early Greek missionaries went to Russia, Saints Cyril and Methodios to the Slav people or Russian missionaries to North America, they provided the indigenous people with services in their own tongue. But, what do we do now in these Islands? Taking a broad view it seems to me that we are quite content to remain within our own ghettos, using languages, ethnic practices and customs not used or understood by the bulk of our people. We lack any sense of relevance and mission or outreach to those outside the Church, and what is even worse, we are not even prepared to accommodate British converts or those British people born into the Faith.

It is the usual practice of the Orthodox Church that this Faith, (the pearl of great value), should be closely identified with the people at large, at the very least by language so that this becomes the norm, so that as the older émigrés or immigrants passed on in death, they leave behind a Church which is relevant to the population at large and which has deep roots in the social structure of these Islands.

In Scripture, (Matthew 13:43), the Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a "pearl of great price" and for me this Kingdom is the Holy Orthodox Church. I prefer to liken it unto a jewel, precious and valuable, a single entity but many faceted. The Faith remains the same, but we, the Orthodox faithful, bring to it our customs, language. We act as guardians or custodians but not as owners; the last thing we should want is to leave an inward looking Church *ad infinitum*.

I think that most people would agree that alternative religions have increased within Britain, to the general disadvantage of the Christian Faith. The human race is always seeking for something as near as to utopia as it can cope with, and thus presenting the devil with numerous opportunities to entrap and confound people and thus lead them away from the truth. We, however, as Orthodox Christians have this truth: timeless, yet always relevant to whatever age it is in. We proclaim Christ today, Christ tomorrow, until all will be revealed in the age that is to come, when He whom we serve returns in glory.

This is why I feel that all the hierarchs and presbytery have a duty not to be obsessed in enlarging their own personal fiefdoms, not to seek temporal advantage, but to advance the Faith until we have a truly Christ-like Church in Britain. We must all bury "self" and raise Christ to pre-eminence; we must all sacrifice ourselves and our wills so that the greater glory that is Christ's prevails - a painful process but one in that we truly show forth Christ, our Lord and Master to all people.

On reflection, if my thoughts stimulate and bring out an ongoing discussion among the laity, perhaps a minor Pentecost will take place and bring about in God's good time an Orthodox Church of Great Britain.

Nicholas McNeish

Healing the Whole

In some parts of the West, having a psychotherapist has become the secular equivalent of having a confessor. The new priests of the mind wield tremendous influence and yet are often bitterly divided amongst themselves; psychologists against therapists, Freudian against Jungian analysts, behaviourists against geneticists and so on. The slightly perjorative term "shrinks" has, in common parlance, come to cover them all, although in truth, the term only has relevance to psychotherapists. This is not the place to examine each discipline and its claims; rather I seek here to examine the spiritual significance of each approach in the context of Orthodox psychotherapy.

The latter term may surprise the reader a little and yet it is the title of a seminal book by the great Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos (ISBN: 960-7070-27-5). The tradition of soul-healing, (literally: "psychotherapy"), is a thoroughly Orthodox Christian one ground in the theoria and praxis of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Much of what we receive today as "psychotherapy" has little if any Christian content. Carl Gustav Jung, the father of modern psychotherapy for example, although the son of a Lutheran pastor, was himself, (if anything), a good old fashioned gnostic. His esoteric teaching concerning the topography of the mind, (animus/anima, the "shadow" side, archetypes etc.) resonates with ancient psychic lore, with which he was both familiar and appreciative. Therefore, although Jung valued enormously religious dimension of human life, (unlike Freud who thought it a neurosis), he was as distant from the Judaeo-Christian tradition as the "old man" of psychoanalysis himself. Many Christian pastoral practitioners have tried to adapt Jung for the Church but have ended up captive to the old system. This is hardly surprising since as Metropolitan Hierotheos makes clear in his books, modern psychotherapy starts from the human side of things, not the revelatory, experience proven, God-ward side.

The Desert "abbas" and "ammas", however start from a completely different base line in their psychotherapy. Their objective in their relationships with their spiritual children was salvation, not adjustment, fulfilment or integration. They knew from the inside of their own struggles, temptations, advances and theological insights what was needful in order that a person might be saved, body, mind and spirit. They communicated with utmost discernment and discretion a "word," (or more usually a story or proverb), tailored to the need of each and every person who came their way. The authenticity of their counsel shone through their Christian humility, not from any so-called professionalism. They knew that for an individual to become a person, (note the difference!), for salvation to be attained, a great struggle had to be negotiated in which God's power and human faculties must work together in full synergistic union. Every human frailty and sin, every incremental step on the road to glory, was known to be a spiritual with a theological solution. Orthodox psychotherapy can only function, therefore, from within the Church's Living Tradition, its oral and pastoral database of living and reposed elders. The great tragedy of our age is that the western church, in neglecting its own spiritual heritage has created a vacuum in which both ignorant fundamentalist excess and secular broken promises flourish much as weeds flourish, mistaken for flowers.

Healing the whole of us, both for Orthodox Christians and for society in general, can only become possible again when these ancient but every new sources of soul-healing are opened up by those who know what they are talking about because they have first applied it to themselves. Healing without Christ is impossible and although it is true that where there is healing there is Christ, for Orthodox Christians at the very least Christ must be explicitly at the centre of all therapies. Better put, we should say that the flourishing of the human person in community is ultimately a question of belief, a conviction that the Triune God IS our healing.

Fr. Gregory

Slugs and Snails

Sometimes I think that the contemporary Christian vocabulary for our human nature has degraded to that sexist riddle of yesteryear ...

*"What are little boys made of? ... slugs and snails and puppy dog tails!
What are little girls made of? ... sugar and spice and all things nice."*

Now, this isn't going to be about gender, but rather, the impoverishment of our language and understanding concerning human nature; anthropology if you like.

When Orthodox talk about prayer, (and talking is not as half as importantly as doing), we say that "the mind descends into the heart." Here's what a non-Orthodox person would probably understand by that statement:-

THE THINKING PART OF US BECOMES MORE AWARE OF THE FEELING PART OF US.

WRONG!

The trouble is that there has been a reduction of mind to "thinking" or even "rational discourse," and a dismissal of the feelings to the heart. In Orthodox Christianity, the mind is everything that goes on in the head, including feelings. The heart of course is neither the blood pump nor the feelings. It is the very centre of our personality with is indivisibly integrated within the union of body and soul. This heart manifests itself to the mind as a sense of "self", consciousness and relatedness to the world and others. The predominant "directional" language for the heart is down and a centre within. So, when Orthodox use their own prayer terminology we mean the following, (very approximately) :-

OUR MENTALITY DESCENDS INTO THE CENTRE OF OUR SELF-FOR-OTHERS

"Intellect" is often used by the Fathers instead of mentality or mind, but this certainly does not mean the "cleverness" faculty! It approximates to the noblest dimension of our whole mind which, however, may become sullied by earth bound or evil thoughts. The heart does not come with a ready made built-in purity either. The heart, inasmuch as the mind, is also a battle field, a place where Christ must conquer and dwell.

So, when Orthodox talk about the "mind descending into the heart" it is, initially, a reference to spiritual warfare. Here in the heart, we fight with the weapons of the Spirit for that purity of heart without which no one will see God. When significant bouts of that battle are won we may feel the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit within us. We should not give these feelings undue attention, (after all they may easily be confused with ordinary feelings of exhilaration or even demonic counterfeits). It is sufficient for us to know that "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Romans 5:5)

As we progress in the Life of the Spirit we may discover that when our minds descend into our hearts, they are "illuminated" ... which is to say that they are enlightened by some holy disposition or granted some wise insight or discernment. This is when we may become useful for others. God will speak to us and through us to others who need to hear his Word. Along with this divine discourse there will also be a transformation of our humanity so that Love of which we speak will also become the Love that we are. The higher and deeper stages of this enlightenment will be when we become the Light of Christ for others. In this, our true and deified state, united and suffused with the energies of Love the Holy Trinity, we will no longer be aware merely of ourselves but only God who grants the fullness of Himself in all ready and receptive human hearts. These final journeys into the heart are truly only the beginnings of a journey into eternity. This my friends, is what the "mind" and the "heart" mean in the hands of God!

Fr. Gregory

Coded for Life

Recently a team of international scientists completed (at least in draft form) the Human Genome Project. This is an endeavour started some years back now to map the genetic code for a human, in other words the "blue print for humanity." We might even talk about God's human (biological) language. Some have welcomed this development in almost biblical apocalyptic tones as the New Jerusalem for humanity heralding the conquest of diseases through therapeutic genetics and the modification for good of our evolutionary path. Others have rounded on this achievement with the rhetoric of suspicion and mistrust or even the occasional Luddite fury. Not content with usurping the place of God we are now even trying to act like God. It will "all end in tears" they say.

Somewhere the truth is being lost in this polarisation of views. The discovery and understanding of the human genome is, in one sense, a discovery like any other discovery. In the right hands and used humbly with restraint it may indeed prove to be a divine wisdom in man for good. Equally, this is not merely one discovery like any other. The possibility of abuse and creating irrevocable and long lasting damage to our species are immense. We are dealing here perhaps with the biological equivalent of nuclear energy. Humanely used, a great blessing, as an instrument of pride or aggression, a deadly curse. Surely we have tasted from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There is no going back.

What is required of us now is the clothing of a spiritual revolution to cover the nakedness of our technological brute power. All those who seek to perpetuate the war between science and religion have nothing constructive to offer in these challenging times. All those who seek to listen with understanding and who are then prepared to speak clearly with love will be signs of hope for the safe and fruitful development of this new biotechnology. May their arm be strengthened.

Fr. Gregory

Tradition and Culture

Having heard a lecture on the early church by Dr. Ken Parry at the University of Manchester when he expressed his mews of tradition, written and unwritten, I wanted to explore the meaning and definition of the concept of Tradition and how we are affected by it in our forms of worship.

The book 'Orthodox Christianity and the English Tradition' written by Fr. Andrew Phillips expresses views on this subject and how returning to Orthodoxy in England can be entirely consistent with our culture and tradition.

The Chambers Etymological Dictionary defines tradition as the handing down of opinions or practices to posterity - unwritten. Culture comes from the Latin *colo, cultas* - to till, to worship. Culture is the state of being cultivated; advancement or refinement is the result of cultivation - to improve. It must follow therefore that, in a particular culture, religion is traditionally related to education. Learning takes place initially within the family unit and proceeds to a wider interaction with the community or society in which we live. The Church formed a very important, indeed an integral part, in that learning process in the past.

Where does Orthodoxy fit into this pattern? The true catholicity of the faith embraced all people in all parts of the Christian world. It was truly a way of life. Right worship was the teaching of the Church together with continual reinforcement of moral values and standards in the home and in the community. The family provided the foundation for later learning and Bible reading daily in every home was the foundation for that learning. Nowadays, sadly, we have lost the traditional religious teaching in the West where the church is becoming decreasingly Christ centred, partly perhaps as a result of the Church being controlled by the State but more important is the influence of secular and liberal thinking, fads and fashions.

In addition to these problems children are having to learn to adjust to multi-cultural conditions whether immigrant or indigenous. Western families are similarly adjusting to a renewal of an Orthodox life-style and worship where Christ centred living is important to them. This has been lost to Western culture for a long time but once again we have found that this true faith is as much a part of our tradition of catholicity as it is universally accepted to be in the East. The common factor is of course, faith.

How does this affect Tradition and our culture in the place in which we find ourselves here and now? We need to have faith to rebuild the Orthodox Christian heritage here where we live and where we have to conquer all kinds of discrimination. The Gospel truth of the love of Jesus and the faith of the Apostles has a universal and timeless value. With this common faith we can confidently be ourselves acknowledging Tradition and accepting God's will for us where we are. Only in the strengthening of unity and trust in the wholeness of faith can we share with our neighbours and learn from one another in our intended uniqueness.

If we try to discover where our roots are we have to accept that they are truly and universally in Orthodox Christianity whatever our tradition and culture by place. The Church Christ left to us cannot change but He does not want us to disregard our past because our pilgrimage is given by Him. If we choose individuality, liberalism, diversity or whatever, then we are in danger of losing our way. If, however, we freely chose to respond to His will with our whole being He is glad to accept us as we are and will give us the direction, humility strength and love to help us on our way. The authority comes from God and not from the imposition of human authority.

Tradition then can be defined as a return to our roots and to stray from this is to be weakened. Culture is defined as an improvement of our state of being by advancing and refining as we go along. If we care to try to understand the 'Book' of rules which is God given it will tell all and very much more. The Church is one because the faith it teaches is one. St. Paul teaches that the Divine Word speaks through the scriptures and is preserved as a living voice in Tradition. Scripture without Tradition can, and often is, distorted, leading to the teaching of false doctrine. St. Paul writes to Timothy:-

"Guard what has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within you."

St. Irenaeus writing in the second century speaks of Tradition:

"Nothing of self except as being all important to God."

Dwynwen East

Feeding Mind and Heart

The cynics say "there is no such thing as a free meal". In the family of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, all His meals are free, and our part is simply to accept them. By the same token, this bears no relation to what has come to be called "forced-feeding" because we have to prepare the way for it to happen. We usually call this "Christian formation" but it is difficult to say where the division between "mind" and "heart" is to be found.

In the Orthodox Church, Formation is really a package deal of teaching the mind and inspiring the heart which takes place within the guidelines of what is called Orthodox Tradition. The OSB lists the five areas of these Traditions as :- the Bible; the Liturgy; the Ecumenical Councils which formulated the Creed; the saints and finally, Church music, art and architecture. The package deal is this: that all these sources of our Tradition are held together in unity. To quote the OSB, "when all of these sources are accepted as the common fountain of the self-revelation of God, it is our faith that they will bring us to the life to which God has invited His creation -- to know Him who has offered us the truth that will set us free"(Page vii).

All this is not to assert that we have a blind obedience to things of the past. Our faithfulness to the past must always be a creative fidelity To live in the Tradition is to live a life of personal encounter with Christ in the Holy Spirit. Bishop Kallistos says the Orthodox Tradition is not static but dynamic. By that he means a living discovery of the Holy Spirit in the present, and he quotes Georges Florovsky as saying:--

"Tradition is a witness of the Spirit; the Spirit's unceasing revelation and preaching of good tidings.....To accept and understand Tradition, we must live within the Church, we must be conscious of the grace-giving presence of the Lord in it; we must feel the breath of the Holy Ghost in it...Tradition is not only a protective, conservative principle, it is, primarily, the principle of growth and regeneration....Tradition is the consistent abiding of the Spirit and not only the memory of words". Jesus said "When the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth"(Jn.16.13) This is the Divine promise which forms the basis of the Orthodox meaning of Tradition.(The Orthodox Church p.198)

So, all those five areas of our Tradition have an important place in feeding mind and heart. All are helpful and they support one another. The first-named, the Bible, carries a large part of the formation of the mind and heart. Most of the Bible is used in our worship and in monasteries the Psalter is read through each week. Our belief is that all parts of both the Old and New Covenants point to Christ and so are regarded as a verbal icon of Him and venerated in the same way. The Gospel Book has place of honour on the altar and is carried in procession at Matins on Sundays and during the Liturgy. In this way we show respect for God's Word.

But it is not just a matter of reading the Scripture. If the mind and heart are to be nurtured, what is written in God's Word must be assimilated. The Church achieves this by using one part of the Bible to explain the other. Two weeks ago, the Sunday of the Dormition of the Theotokos coincided with the commemoration of the Prophet Samuel. In the Kontakion for the day, the OT Prophet was shown to be a precursor of the Theotokos:-

*"Thou wast a precious gift to God before thy conception
Thou didst serve Him from infancy like an angel
and wast granted to fortell future events, wherefore we cry to thee
Rejoice, O Samuel, thou Prophet of God and great high priest."*

There, one part of Scripture, the OT, is being used to celebrate the memory of a true prophet and priest, whilst using his story to point forward to the Mother of the Lord. This is feeding the mind, the understanding part of us, with information, and, at the same time, filling the heart, i.e. the loving part of

us, with endearments. Different parts of the Tradition aim, in their different ways, to offer similar nourishment

For example, the celebration of the Liturgy, steeped as it is in the words of both the Old and New Testaments, is expected to feed both our mind and our heart, helped by constant repetition, and also by the knowledge that we are not spectators watching others make the offering. All present are, in fact, on stage, and have a part to play in "commending ourselves and one another to Christ, our God".

Again, the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils; the Creed, and the writings of those whom we call "Fathers of the Church" are in their different ways meant to help us learn about, and also love, the God whom we serve. It is tempting to think that the Creeds, councils and Fathers, feed the mind, whereas the saints, in general, feed the heart. But the truth is that both help our belief, and what we truly believe, controls our life. If, deep down in me, I truly believe that I am called, summoned, as St. Paul says, to be a saint (Rom. 1.7), then I must have equal regard, not only for the decisions of Church Councils of long ago, but also welcome as my sister in the faith, say, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth who gave her life for Christ and His Church at the start of the Russian Revolution. Her life-offering written in blood in 1918 is part of the same offering which St. Athanasius wrote in the Creed in 325, and we have to see them as two sides of the same coin because the Faith is One.

The fifth and final area of our Tradition is the one concerned with music, architecture and painting. It was interesting to read in a recent copy of AGAIN that in an devastated area of Tirana in Albania, the Bishop had built a beautiful Church. His aim is to renew the culture of that country through beauty, hoping to show the people the contrast between fallen nature and redeemed nature. "The hope of all of Albania" he says, "is to see the beauty of Christ". (#22.1.19) What is true of war-torn Albania is also true of the back streets of Manchester or the High Veld of Africa.

Many people are reached by beautiful music; lovely churches, and meaningful icons. The advertising world of today knows well enough the value of the eye-gate and its presentations are often matched with haunting music. The Church down the ages has used and sanctified all these forms of beauty because they support and provide backing for the other parts of our valued Tradition. At the so-called Reformation in the 16th century, theology and mysticism, mind and heart you may say, became separated, as also did liturgy and personal devotion. The Orthodox Church has worked hard to avoid any such division.

"Theology, mysticism, spirituality, moral rules, worship, art: these things must not be kept in separate compartments. Doctrine cannot be understood unless it is prayed...and doctrine, if it is to be prayed, must also be lived. Theology without action, as St Maximus put it, is the theology of demons. The Creed belongs only to those who live it. Faith and love, theology and life, are inseparable. In our Liturgy, the Creed is introduced with the words "Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Trinity one in essence and undivided". This exactly expresses the Orthodox attitude to Tradition. If we do not love one another, we cannot love God; and if we do not love God, we cannot make a true confession of faith and cannot enter the spirit of Tradition, for there is no other way of knowing God than to love Him". (Bp. Kallistos "The Orthodox Church" p.207)

We pray for God's continual help that the understanding and the loving parts of our make-up may be fused together, because, as St. Paul says:-- "to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.....for the equipping of the saints...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"(Eph.4.13)

Fr. John-Mark Titterington

Sporting Shrines

September has seen a glorious expression of idealism and commitment by international athletes at the Olympic Games in Sydney, marred only by all too frequent incidences of performance enhancing drug taking. The Olympics have shown in modern times how sporting ideals can unite people and how personal excellence, commitment and idealism can ennoble the human spirit. Such sentiments are also behind a new Lloyd Webber / Ben Elton collaboration musical in the West End at the moment called "The Beautiful Game," in which football is seen to unite the Catholic and Protestant warring factions in Northern Ireland. Although this has proved to be both true and effective in desegregated schools in the province, the supposed reconciling power of sport has not been particularly in evidence in the history and present reality of Catholic-Protestant rivalry between Rangers / Celtic, Manchester United / Manchester City and Liverpool / Everton, to name a few.

Myths are often built on half-truths. The myth here is that sport can truly unite humanity. It has some plausibility when the sporting ideal is maintained rather than the tribal ideal. The tribal imperative can be the curse of all that is excellent in human affairs; in culture, sport, and yes, in religion too. However, the myth of sport's reconciling power is now expanding to embrace wider and quasi-religious themes. Sociologists have commented on sport-as-religion for many years. Cable TV has now brought the sporting shrine into many UK living rooms. An advertisement on British TV currently promotes Mr. Murdoch's SKY Sports Channel by suggesting that emotional release in the following of sports can help deal with griefs and problems in our day to day lives. Nobody takes this too seriously of course, but sport is now rapidly becoming the new religion. This is especially true amongst disaffected adolescent boys whose sporting dreams and obsessions are wildly out of touch with their actual abilities and potentials in other areas. It is the one area of socially acceptable male identity and bonding untouched by feminism ... a place where "a lad can be a lad." Women and girls seem to have much more sensible ideas about sport in our culture. They are just as passionate and committed but the religious / gender subtext seems not to feature so much.

What can we learn from all of this as Orthodox Christians? Well, there are things to emulate and recognise in common between Orthodox Christianity and sport if only by way of analogy. St. Paul writes to the Church in Corinth urging the Christians there to "run (the race)," and "exercise self-control" [1 Corinthians 9:24-27]. By this he means that the Christian life requires effort, commitment and dedication. Orthodoxy is a consoling faith, yes, but like sport at the highest level, it is also very demanding. Would it be worthwhile if it were not? Jesus tells us that without him we can do nothing, [John 15:5]. All our efforts, then, are only effective if we work with God according to His power and grace in our lives. This does not mean though that we just sit back and "let Him do it." God does not honour the lazy, the fickle, the inconstant and the waverers. "Because you are lukewarm," He says, "and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth." [Revelation 3:16]. Living the Christian life requires as much effort and dedication as demanded of every athlete. It is an ascetic calling to holiness and union with God; not just for monks and nuns, those "athletes of the Spirit," but for all of us. Without this dedication toward purity of heart, none of us shall see God, [Matthew 5:8].

We can also learn from sport (at its best) that tribalism has no place in the Christian faith. The Orthodox faith is Catholic because it is God's whole dispensation for all mankind. The Church in the power of the Holy Spirit has a diversity for all races and cultures for all these are one in Christ. The ethnic narrow-mindedness of much contemporary Orthodoxy is nothing short of scandalous, an insult to the Creator. The alternatives we find with some other Christians are just as wrong-headed. Vainly do they seek to build a united "mega-Christianity" by an adherence to one Christian leader, one Christian confession or even a toleration for co-existing discordant multiple human-based opinions. What a monstrous thing! The Church's unity (a symbol and instrument for human unity) is built on the God-manhood of Christ and the diverse expressions of redeemed humanity wrought by the Spirit in the Church which is His Body. Orthodox must embrace both in themselves and between each other an excellence in love and spiritual endeavour which will put all the sporting religious myths to shame. This divine unity in our midst must become so attractive to others, so worth striving for that all degraded notions of the Church built upon collective power, rampant individualism or tribal division will dissolve away in their exposed fallen states. True ecumenism exists where Christians first seek the Kingdom of God and avoid all occasions of ecclesiastical politics, (intra and inter-Church) like the

plague. True ecumenism is to find salvation and finding it to love others with a dedication matching the best of the idealism we can find in sport or any other human endeavour. You never know. Were this to happen our youth might get a bigger "buzz" out of belonging to the Orthodox Church than cheering on their sporting heroes. It can happen if our idealism, commitment and dedication matches theirs.

Fr. Gregory

The Holy Ones

In the Orthodox Church, holiness is the *natural* state of humankind. This needs emphasising because a widespread misunderstanding of holiness would have us think that sanctity was an extraordinary or exceptional human state. Far from it! In fact holiness is not even rare. We consider it remarkable perhaps only by contrasting it with the corruption which is deemed by others to be more newsworthy. There have been, are and will be countless billions of saints, the holy ones. Most of these are only known to a small circle of people who know them, and even then some are not known at all, living godly lives in obscurity. But, whether known or unknown, saints are both commonplace and thoroughly natural examples of humanity at its best.

Now, lest some should misunderstand or suspect this doctrine of the error that saints are self made, allow me to stress that the natural condition of human sanctity is not achieved in the smallest manner without divine intervention and grace and this also is natural both in the sense that God acts always for our good and we are designed to cooperate with and in Him to achieve our full human potential, theiosis or deification. "Without God, man cannot; without man, God will not" to paraphrase the Blessed Augustine ... who in this matter at least got things right! Perhaps this confounder of Pelagius is not generally known for his affirmation of the role of the human will, but there we are!

I mention these basic principles of holiness ... our natural state, the universality of it and the work of God and humankind together because it has a very direct bearing on how saints are recognised in the Orthodox Church and what difference the holy ones make in our Christian lives as we aspire to follow the examples of their godly lives and virtue.

Firstly, in so far as holiness is our natural, universal state, we must all aspire to it if we wish to attain "the stature of the fullness of Christ" ... which is salvation, (Ephesians 4:13). This state of holiness is nothing less than the purpose of God to be united in love with his creatures, for all to conformed to His image and likeness, His perfection (Matthew 5:48). Saints therefore are made from on high but discovered on the ground. This is where we should look for them; in our daily lives, ordinary people who have been touched by the divine Fire, people who having been changed have the power from God to change others.

This is why the Orthodox Church insists that saints may only be discovered and celebrated by the whole People of God. The glorification of a saint is an act of praise to God from the body of Christ. In the same way that the people acclaim "Axios!" (worthy) at an ordination so do they also rejoice to say "Aghios!" (holy) to their bishop who will inscribe the righteous in the doxology and Calendar of the Church. No Vatican bureaucracy for us to make the decision on our behalf. Ours is the voice even if it is the bishop in the end who has the final say. This is surely why there were *so many* Orthodox saints in the First Millennium of Christianity in Britain. Sanctity was natural ... to be fought for certainly, but expected ... the normal and desirable state of a Christian. As soon as saint making was removed to an abstract and distant realm the embers of faith burned exceedingly low, even sometimes all but extinguished. Political radicals nowadays want to "reclaim the streets." We Orthodox are in the business of reclaiming (venerating) the saints! In so doing we shall be reclaiming sanctity for ourselves.

There are of course practical matters here also which touch upon how we may acquire this holiness for ourselves. Let us recall our second point that this is a synergy of human and divine wills, a coincidence of energies in heaven and here on earth. Holiness in the Orthodox Church is a rod glowing with the radiance of the Fire, the love of the Lover for the Beloved, the heavenly Garment of an earthly body. St. Seraphim of Sarov declared as the fruition and insight of his many ascetic labours that the whole purpose of the Christian life was to acquire the Holy Spirit. In this he was not speaking simply to fellow monastics but to all Christians. Be what God intends you to be! This is made a whole lot easier by "keeping the right company!" As Christians we are bid to maintain our fellowship in the household of faith, to sustain our belonging within the Communion of Saints. In keeping company with the Friends of God we are more likely to desire His friendship as well. Furthermore, as we are encouraged and emboldened by the prayers and example of the saints the Holy Spirit finds vessels that being more surely crafted for their original purpose ... to be "bearers of God." I repeat; this is ordinary, this is natural. This is what we are called to be.

I close by asking of myself and then each one of us a most basic question. What is it that we really want in and from our Christian lives. Be careful how you answer. Be with the saints, the Holy Ones of God!

Fr. Gregory

A Question of Mistaken Identity

"Oh hello! Nice to meet you. What do you do then?"

How many times have we said this to a new acquaintance? We say it almost automatically. It's a socially sanctioned greeting which passes without much thought.

"Oh ... I ... uhm, don't work ... I've got this painful condition you see ..."

"Oh, I'm at home with the children ... but I do get out and help out as much as I can you know!"

When the apologetic embarrassed fumbling has finished, the damage has been done. When work, (narrowly understood), is allowed to define our sense of identity and we don't work, then we feel guilty at not doing our bit; we feel that we have little or no standing in the eyes of others.

It's a question of mistaken identity. Not with Descartes do we say "I think therefore I am," rather "I work therefore I am." (I don't know which is worse!)

What's so distressing is that we all seem to fall into the trap; we all so easily accept what contemporary culture says about ourselves and our self worth. Perhaps the mode of questioning should consciously change. How about the following openers?

" ... what are your interests then?"

" ... how is your family / friend faring?"

" ... how's your week been?"

The questions our Lord asked people were even more to the point.

"Do you want to be healed?" (John 5:6)

"Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29)

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (John 21:16)

Perhaps we can help turn the tide on how we see ourselves and each other simply by asking more appropriate questions in ordinary conversations. Such a simple thing to do really and so potentially fruitful!

Fr. Gregory

Information Degradation

If you are reading this, (which, of course, you are!), then you are part of that information rich World Wide Web. Not perhaps since William Caxton launched the printing press has so much been available to so many by so few. Access to and control of information has always been an instrument of political power. The unregulated nature of the Web was its original and prophetic character. However, this leveller of information, (at least for those who can afford the technology), is now being harnessed to commercial interests. Politicians have nonetheless largely steered clear of the Web because each individual controls his exposure and politics is only interested in the mass dissemination of ideology and spin. The television and tabloid press remain the main vehicles for the formation of opinion. Nonetheless the Web is, I suspect, shrinking in its empowerment of individuals as it expands in its globalising commercialisation. Information overload is not as worrying as information degradation. Never has there been so much choice; but, on the other hand, never has there been so much trash. Parallel developments can be discerned in other digital media, particularly non-terrestrial TV.

Of course there is always the "off" button, but much trashy information is mesmerising in its very banality. It tends to send us to sleep, not physically you understand, (although that sometimes!), but spiritually. We are far less likely to ask the "Big Questions" if our minds have been numbed by the shallow and inconsequential ones. Soaps, they say, imitate life. No, they replace and subvert life. We still have "bread and circuses." Today, it's the TV Quiz Show.

Perhaps we put too much of a premium on "communication" anyway. Communion is at the heart of the Orthodox life, not communication. We are saved by our union with God, (our progressive theosis), not simply by knowing things about God, (or the world). Natural knowledge and human intercourse has its place but it can be no substitute for that transformative encounter which is at the very heart of our walk with God and each other. Perhaps all this communication is just a diversion, a distraction from the real business of life. Perhaps we should turn off our computers, disconnect the phones, cancel the papers for a week and devote all that extra time to prayer. Webmaster, heal thyself!

Fr. Gregory

Diakonia

Jesus made careful preparations for the continuance of His earthly ministry following His Ascension in two main areas:--

Firstly, He chose and trained the twelve men who at that stage are best described as "disciples, that is, learners. He gave them what we call today "formation"

Secondly, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, those men properly became "Apostles," that is, men sent out with a message that Jesus was the Son of God who had defeated the powers of death and was Himself now Risen, Ascended and Glorified.

Those Apostles firmly believed that The Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth and on that basis they set about the preaching and teaching as recorded in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

Fine, but it didn't quite work out as simply as that, mainly because so many people came crowding into the new society. Soon it became clear that delegation was needed and in Acts 6, we find the Twelve appointing seven men of good reputation to look after the day to day running of the daily food distribution because, they said, "it is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables" (6.2).

This first development of the extension of the Church's ministry in the appointment of seven deacons appears to have more to do with the care of people in God's Name, than with the care of the Church as a worshipping community. The short life of St. Stephen which follows shows that this is not true -- there was, in fact, no break intended between the two sides of the work. So "diakonia" cannot be restricted to the work of the deacon -- we are all deacons in Christ's church, just as all believers share a type of priesthood. The ministries of the Church, both in her worship and in her work in the community, are not separate, they are closely related -- they are two sides of the same coin, and, as the life and death of St. Stephen show, they are always fraught with danger.

So much for the first century of the Church's life. As we enter the last month of the 20th century, let us look at just one aspect of the church's ministry of "diakonia" during that century in the far-off and war-torn country of Korea. Our Church was founded in Seoul in the early years of the century by Russian missionaries. All went swimmingly until the first world war and the October Revolution put an end to any more aid from Russia, and the struggling Church was left to fend for itself until about 1980. Then another priest came, Fr Sotirios Trambas, and he takes up the story:-- "Our history" he says, "is made up of the struggle to spread the message of salvation and to serve one's fellow human being, "for whom Christ died." (Romans 14.15)

Fr Sotirios goes on :--"We were moved by the fact that, all through these years, the Orthodox Churches, despite their local difficulties found something to share with our small flock. The size of the offering was of no importance. It sufficed that it should express the bonds of true communion. It mattered not whether their aid contributed to a spectacular rise in the number of Orthodox. It was enough that the task of mission should be seen as an effort to share the joy of salvation. It was of little importance whether the contributions solved the problems of our Korean brothers and sisters or not. It sufficed that this moral, spiritual and material aid gave them courage".

Fr. Soterios makes an important point here, not only for mission but also for the wider question of diakonia: we who have so much, often consider that what we are able to send to help struggling communities is "hardly worth while." We forget that it is not only the thought that counts; it is the love and the prayer and the moral support as well, which are all important. That is diakonia in action and it is the ground-base of mission, and both go hand in hand with our worship.

Fr Sotirios explains it better than I can when he says:- "A most fundamental aspect of our missionary work was diakonia. In the service of the Word, we set out to found new parishes on firm foundations. In the service of our peers, we created poor boxes, scholarship funds, kindergartens, dispensaries and so on.....In other words, we do not consider as a basic missionary imperative, the sole preaching of the Gospel, but also the putting into practice of the Gospel message".

I hope that you are not bored with Korea, because at this juncture, Fr Soterios makes what would be to the Protestant, Western mind, a very strange claim. He says:---

"Together with God's help, we were recently able to open the first Orthodox monastery on Asian soil: the convent of Our Lord's Transfiguration, sixty kilometres from Seoul, with four Greek nuns.A monastery had to be founded in order to remind us that the pre-requisite for mission is unceasing prayer, that is, the unbroken glorification of the life-giving Trinity. Besides, there was an urgent need for providing a different form of witness in our secularised society, a testimony emphasizing, at the same time, voluntary abstinence from the enjoyment of material goods, and, the desire to offer up these goods to God.

Alongside all this, the sisters achieved something else :- the harmonising of their witness with that of the Church, and to give new believers in particular the picture of a Christian community whose chief concern is service to one's neighbour. They organise retreats; they receive all and sundry with loving kindness; they chant Mattins and Vespers; they help the priest and the catechist in their work; they prepare and serve the meals; they clean the cells; they speak words of encouragement to each person; they smile at everyone. In other words, they share joyfully that which they have and are thereby revealing the secret of Christian existence." Fr. Soterios sums up :-

"The example of diakonia reveals the fact, that a living relationship with Christ, frees us from our narrow interests, constantly stirring up in us the spirit of sacrifice, and constantly urging us to struggle for justice and fraternal love."

"The greatest blessing which God could bestow on us was the small Korean flock's not hugging jealously to itself the Gospel message, the secret of diakonia, and the joy of being a member of the Orthodox family at large. Indeed, it gives, and is still giving, testimony to its faith within the society in which its lives, so that "believers are added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and of women". (Acts 5:15).

By trying faithfully to follow the path laid out in Acts of the Apostles, the infant Church in Korea is, I believe, teaching us how to pass on "that which we have believed" (1 Corinthians 15.1) through our "diakonia" / service to God and His people..

Fr. John-Mark

[Quotations from "You Shall be My Witnesses", ed. by George Lemopoulos, Tertios Publications].