

Archive 2002

Cyprus 2002

On Wednesday 13th November, six members gathered at the home of Rita-Mary to commence their annual pilgrimage to Cyprus. On the Thursday morning after having obtained a vehicle we made our way into Limassol. Our first stop was at the church shop where we purchased a number of items including the Communion Set for use when visiting the sick.

Friday morning saw us on our way to Kiti to visit the church of Panagia Angeloktistos where we saw a number of icons some dating back to the second half of the eleventh century. We later made our way to the Stavrouni Monastery which is situated at the very top of a mountain.

Unfortunately this was closed until after 2 pm, but after lunch we did manage to gain access. There is an excellent shop where we purchased a number of icons and cards. In the grounds below the monastery there is a chapel dedicated to All Saints of Cyprus.

Ayia Paraskevi in Yeroskipos was again visited on the Saturday on our way to Paphos where we called at the church shop where we managed to purchase some icons.

Sunday morning we attended the service at the Antiochian Church of St. Ignatios. Again we were made welcome and over coffee we renewed our acquaintance with a number of members we had met the previous year. Rita-Mary again met Maria John Paul who kindly invited us to visit her home on the Monday evening.

Nicosia called on the Monday morning and a visit to the observation tower in the Woolworth building gave us a good sight of the Turkish Quarter over the 'green line.' Once again the shops called and we managed to find the shop selling icons, books and cards – needless to say further purchases took place!

On the return journey we called at the monastery of St. Minas. In the evening we were met at our hotel by Maria John Paul and followed her to her home. There we met her husband Freddie and daughter and spent a very pleasant evening in conversation.

Last year we tried to visit the monastery of Agios Georgios Alamanos, this year we were more fortunate and found a well-stocked shop. It was then decided that we would try to find the monastery of Agios Machairas, Following the map and directions from helpful villagers we found what we thought was the right road which was well paved – so far so good – until the paved section ran out and became a dirt track which had been cut into the side of the mountain. The villager on the donkey looked quite surprised to see us. Eventually we managed to find space to turn round and retrace our tracks.

The final morning was once again spent in Limassol, where some final shopping was done. We also managed to see inside the Cathedral Church of Ayia Napa, which in previous years has been closed for renovations.

Once more we must thank Ron for organising the car and continuing his excellent skills in acting as chauffeur and banker.

Peter Hoyland

by Fr. Gregory on a Theophany theme

The Feast of the Theophany is the ancient celebration of the baptism of Christ by the Church. Indeed, the celebrations of the birth and baptism of Christ were juxtaposed in some places. Only in the West did the baptism of Christ fade from view and then was replaced by the visit of the Magi. In the Orthodox Church, the Feast of the Theophany is arguably as important as that of the Nativity. Much the same pattern of services is prescribed. Particular to Theophany is the Great Blessing of the Waters. Whether on the frozen surface of a Siberian lake or in the *slightly* warmer waters of the Mediterranean this is a great celebration of the sanctification of Creation and the recreation of human persons within it. It is vital, therefore, that we understand the importance of our own baptism and chrismation within the Orthodox Church, especially at this time when the Church performs baptisms and chrismations and invites her children to renew their vows along with the neophyte new members of the Body of Christ.

To Be Baptised



To be baptised is to be immersed and engaged in the death and resurrection of Christ; immersed because the waters of the Trinity must drown our old self which is condemned under the burden of death and decay so that the new resurrection self may be born and grow daily; engaged because none of this happens without our active energetic effort, counselled by the Church and permeated by the grace of the Holy Spirit. We should expect our once-for-all baptism, therefore, to be a daily renewal in the image and likeness of God; not just a cleansing from sin but a regeneration of our very natures in Christ.

To be baptised is to be incorporated within the Body of Christ, the Church. Our baptism is not a solitary thing, a personal possession or state. St. Paul talks consistently through his letters of the corporate nature of our Christian lives. We are only Christians in any significant sense when we are “in the Body.” Baptism puts us there but we have to work at deepening our identity and commitment within the Church, for it is here, in the Church that we discover our new and true resurrection selves. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian as Wesley so eloquently declared in an Orthodox manner! Our Lord himself taught that He is the True Vine and we are the branches. Whoever heard of branches being severed from each other or, here, from the Stem and Root of Jesse, who is Christ?

To Be Chrismated



To be chrismated is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The great staretz and saint, Seraphim of Sarov declared that the whole purpose of the Christian life was “the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.” This may seem a little strange thing to say if we are supposed to receive the Holy Spirit at our chrismation. How can we acquire the Holy Spirit if we are already filled by Him at our chrismation? Much the same question can be asked of our forgiveness at baptism. If we are cleansed at our baptism, how can we be forgiven again? The answer to each question is similar in that we are called upon to renew daily the reality of both our baptism and our chrismation; by repentance, confession and ascetic endeavour with baptism and by eucharistic communion and unceasing prayer with chrismation. Therefore, our chrismation should be (and must be) a new Pentecost daily for each one of us within Christ’s Church.



The purpose then of our baptism and chrismation is no less than to be God’s agents in a new creation, the kingdom of God, the renewal of the Cosmos, to be glorified and glorify.

The Express Image of His Father by Fr. John-Mark (Titterington)

Parish Deacon of the parish of St. Aidan, South Manchester (Levenshulme)

Not often do the readings at the Liturgy balance one another but today they do so quite perfectly. St. Luke's account of the Nativity Our Blessed Lord's simple yet profound, truth portraying beauty and with never a word wasted. Fortunately, St Luke's account is still well-known and much-loved.

By contrast the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews are not so well known, but in their own way they back up perfectly the accounts in the Gospel. First of all, the author uses two important pictures to describe who Jesus was. He says He was the effulgence, the light which shines forth, the light which is reflected, of God's glory. Then he goes on to say, in Greek, that He is the character of God's essence. That Greek word character means two things. First a seal made in wax and then secondly, the impression made by the seal in the wax. So when the writer says that Jesus was the character of God, he means that He was the exact image of God.

This means that the author of Hebrews is quite clear that the great and original glory of God also belongs to Jesus IS God's Glory and this means that the glory of God doesn't consist in crushing men and reducing them to slavery. No, it consists of serving them and loving them, and in the end dying for them. His glory is not going to shatter men: it is going to serve them in love. As the angel announced:-- "there is born to you this day...a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord"(Luke 2:11)

Like all the New Testament writers, the author of Hebrews never doubted His ultimate triumph.

They were thinking of a Galilean carpenter who was crucified as a criminal on a hill outside Jerusalem and now they themselves faced savage persecution -- and it was to help them face and survive persecution that this letter was written. But they never doubted the eventual victory. They were quite certain that God's love was backed by His power, and that in the end, the kingdoms of this world would be the Kingdoms of the Lord and His Christ.

But more even than that. The early Church held that Jesus, the Son of God, had been His Father's agent in the creation of the world; "Through Him also He created the worlds" (Plural, note, verse 2) They were filled with the thought that the one who had created the worlds, would be also the One who redeemed it. The next verse 3, is quoted verbatim in the Liturgy of St Basil which we are using today. It says:--"who, being the brightness of His Glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power" (3 x tremendous descriptions of Christ's work) and the author goes on to his punch-line:--"when He had, by Himself, purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" This is the Saviour who is Christ, the Lord.

So, those first Christians did not believe that God had created the world and then had left it to somehow run itself. They saw the hand of God using His Son as the Agent of Creation, and then later, sending Him into the world of His creation to redeem it and bring back to Himself the souls who were lost

All this was not properly known until, in the fullness of time, Jesus the Son was Born.

More was revealed at His Transfiguration on the Holy Mount and more still, of course, in His glorious Resurrection. But it was the Birth, described by St Luke, which made all this not only possible, but "seeable" And that "seeableness" is important.

Notice that Hebrews describes Jesus as "the express image of His Person" (v.3). By this he means that the Son's "Person" is distinct from the Father's. The Son is the perfect image or icon of the Father. In turn, this means that the Holy Trinity, three "Persons" but one God, can only be known through Our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, you remember, asked the disciples "Have I been so long with you and yet you have not known me? He who has seen me, has seen the Father" (John 14.9) No one, we believe, knows the Father except through the Son, and this has important implications for us today, in our relations with

other faiths, and also, strangely enough, with some Christian churches.

Those opening four verses, then, of the Epistle to the Hebrews, provide a perfect commentary on today's Gospel. St Luke describes the mechanics of Jesus' entry into this world. Hebrews gives us the background from way-back in time; and it lifts the veil just a little, on the long-term effects in eternity. For the present time, the writer is equally clear that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God's supreme revelation to men, and the only One we are ever likely to have.

And this is the bottom line for us as we celebrate His Glorious Birth among men.

The Incarnation by Fr. Christopher (Rogers)

Parish Priest of the new parish of St. Seraphim and St. Beuno, South Lancashire (Heywood)

Here is what a well-known monk by the name of Thomas Merton had to say about Christmas:

Christ is born. He is born to us. And, He is born today. For Christmas is not merely a day like every other day. It is a day made holy and special by a sacred mystery.... Today, eternity enters into time, and time, sanctified, is caught up into eternity... Therefore, the church exults, as the angels come down to announce not merely an old thing which happened long ago, but a new thing, which happens today...

Christmas Carol

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer;

Women observes crib 'What's that got to do with Christmas?!

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. The tourists stayed away this year afraid that they might die.

I'm dreaming of an Ulster Christmas. Just like the one we used to know. Where the tree tops glisten and schoolchildren listen to sectarian abuse in the snow.

One of the quotes that I found very informative is one made by Mahatma Ghandi after having read the Christian scriptures. He said he would have become a Christian had he not known so many of us. We have abused our privilege to put down people of other faiths in other parts of the world, and in other times. Sometimes, people are unwilling to accept Christ because they know us — a heavy indictment is laid upon us as we read this story of Herod's intent.

Here, at the beginning of his life as Jesus is born, we are told that there were two groups of people who were told that Jesus was the Messiah. The first, you will recall, were the shepherds in the fields, the common folk of Judaism. The second were the Magi, the astrologers from a foreign nation with a foreign religion.

The Christmas season tells us that the light of Christ was declared to be for both the educated and the uneducated, for both the rich and for the poor. The light of Christ is for the person of leisure and the

daily worker, for those raised in the community and those outside the community of faith. The light of Christ is for the citizen and for the foreigner.

From the time of the exile in Egypt, Israel has been called to be a light to the nations. In the star that the Magi followed, we have a symbol of what that light means— a small light in the midst of a great darkness; a small light to attract those who see it, not to itself, but to Jesus the incarnate Lord.

Israel often assumed that being a light was for its own privilege; that being a light was for others to admire and to envy. Christians do the same thing. Israel often assumed that being a member of the community of faith was sufficient righteousness before God — so do Christians.

King Herod used the cloak of worship when he told the Magi, "Go and find the child and then come and tell me where he is so that I can worship him too." Herod used that cloak of worship to hide his intent to murder. Unfortunately, Christians do the same thing. As a result of those crimes, both they and we often lose sight of our call to be a light to the nation, a light, indeed, to the whole world. The strangers — the Magi see the light, and are attracted, just as the God fearers who worshipped in the synagogues of the Roman Empire saw the light of God in synagogue worship and were attracted to God, but were unwilling to join the community of faith.

"Great is the mystery of godliness [piety]: God was manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16).

These words of the holy Apostle testify that the miracle of the incarnation of the Son of God exceeds the understanding of our limited mind. Indeed, we can believe, but cannot explain, the event that took place two thousand years ago in Bethlehem: that, in the one Person of Jesus Christ, two natures so different and contrary in essence were joined together: the superterrestrial, eternal and infinite divine nature with the material, limited and feeble human nature.

Nonetheless, the Gospels and the apostolic epistles reveal to us, to the extent of our abilities, certain aspects of the miracle of the incarnation of the Son of God. Saint John the Theologian, at the very beginning of his Gospel, elevates our thought to the pre-eternal existence of the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, Whom he calls the Word, saying: ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."*** (John 1:1-3, 14)

The Son of God's name, the Word, indicates that one must not understand His birth from the Father in the sense of an ordinary birth: it occurred passionlessly and without separation. The Son of God is born from the Father like a word is born from a thought. A thought and a word are distinct from one another, and at the same time inseparable. There is no word without a thought, and a thought is without fail expressed in a word.

The subsequent apostolic preaching reveals all the more fully the truth of Christ's divine-human nature: He is the only begotten (the only) Son of God, Who was begotten of the Father before all ages, i.e., He is eternal, as God the Father is also eternal. The Son of God has the same divine nature that God the Father has, and is therefore omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is the Creator of the visible and invisible worlds, and of us men. In a word, He, being the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, true and perfect God. Faith in Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God represents the stronghold or rock upon which the Church is established, according to the word of the Lord: ***Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*** (Matt. 16:18).

[The Purpose of the Incarnation of the Son of God](#)

Christ became man not only to teach us the true way and to show us a good example. He became man in order to unite us with Himself, to join our feeble, diseased human nature to His divinity. The Nativity

of Christ testifies to the fact that we attain the ultimate aim of our life not only by faith and by striving for good, but chiefly by the regenerating power of the incarnate Son of God, with Whom we are united.

Delving deeply into the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, we see that it is closely bound up with the mystery of Holy Communion and with the Church, which, according to apostolic teaching, is the mystical Body of Christ. In the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, a man is joined to the divine-human nature of Christ; he unites with Him and in this union is wholly transfigured. At the same time, in Holy Communion, a Christian unites also with other members of the Church - and thus the mystical Body of Christ grows.

Heterodox Christians who do not believe in Holy Communion understand union with Christ in an allegorical, metaphorical sense, or in the sense of only a spiritual communion with Him. But for spiritual communion, the incarnation of the Son of God is superfluous. After all, even before the Nativity of Christ, the prophets and the righteous were counted worthy of grace-filled communion with God.

One must understand that man is ill not only spiritually, but also physically: all of human nature has been harmed by sin. It is essential, therefore, to heal the whole man, not only his spiritual part. To remove any doubt in the necessity for total communion with Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His discourse on the Bread of Life, speaks thus: "***Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day... He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.***" (John 6:53-54, 56). Later, Christ uses the metaphor of the grapevine to explain to His disciples that it is precisely in close union with Him that man receives the strength essential for spiritual development and perfection: "***As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.***" (John 15:4-5).

Some holy Fathers have justly likened Holy Communion to the mystical tree of life, from which our primogenitors ate in Eden, and which afterwards St. John the Theologian saw in paradise (Gen. 2:9, Rev. 2:7, 22:2). In Holy Communion, a Christian is joined to the immortal life of the God-Man.

However, there is good news. The passing good news is that we cannot snuff out the light even in ourselves. Christ will make his light shine in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it — even if the darkness is our own selves. We can lead lives that make people reluctant to join with us in the Christian faith and life, but God willing, we will choose not to. Instead, we will discover that in blessing others, we ourselves are blessed.

It is our joy and our privilege, our calling and our duty as Christian people to kindle the light of Christ in others. As we do so, then we can see the light kindled therein, and they can see the light of Christ rekindled in us.

As Jesus would say to us, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven." Let us resolve to make 2002 a year in which we strive to share Christ with others. Let us resolve to make this year one in which we work hard to grow in the Lord, to let our light shine and to kindle the light of Christ in those around us, to put aside immorality and envy and hatred, fear and destruction, that we may know him and make him known — He who has come to save the world.

Christ is born. He is born to us. And, He is born today. For Christmas is not merely a day like every other day. It is a day made holy and special by a sacred mystery.... Today, eternity enters into time, and time, sanctified, is caught up into eternity... Therefore, the church exults, as the angels come down to announce not merely an old thing which happened long ago, but a new thing, which happens today...

Contradictions and Hopes

by Fr. Gregory

Recently I contributed to an Internet discussion on Orthodoxy's contention that western theology in the second Millennium suffered degradation and deformity through certain internal contradictions. I was challenged to substantiate my claim and found myself talking about love and justice, heaven and hell. As Great Lent approaches it seems appropriate to give these reflections a wider audience.

Internal contradictions

"It" (western Christianity for want of a better word; although one could refer to the commonality of Catholic and Protestant Christianity) ... "it" is in internal contradiction concerning God's will and His love. Formally, it resolutely affirms that "God is Love" and yet in defence of God's justice, holiness, will and sovereignty, it unstitches much of this basic Christian conviction.

God is often portrayed in western theology as constrained by His own nature to act or preordain things that His Love would never allow by its own; for example, preordained eternal damnation. In other words, justice controls love rather than the other way round. The whole topography of hell in the west is drawn by this dilemma. Hell exists in "eastern" Christian thought of course, but not as a divine necessity, rather it is created by the tragic choice of a perverted human will. God's will is that ALL should be saved but this will is not inexorable because humans still have the will to resist. We must pray that all shall be saved but we cannot KNOW that all shall be saved.

This divided western mind concerning heaven and hell in the love and the justice of God was, if anything, enhanced and not resolved by the Reformation. The very notion of grace here is flawed by a contradiction. God must act in a way contrary to his true nature, which is Love. Catholicism probably emerged in better shape because it moderated the excesses of this schizoid theology in the Middle Ages. Nonetheless it remain formally committed to the idea of a constraint laid upon God by human ideas of justice, holiness and sovereign power.

Arguably, various Holy Spirit movements of the last few hundred years have loosened up the rigid scholastic neo-orthodoxies of the West but, so often, only in a subjectivist, pietistic direction. So long as this contradiction in the nature of God is not faced, the impasse over grace and freewill, heaven and hell will remain.

The "east" of course has synergy, the cooperation of the human and the divine which is instrumental to love and the achievement of salvation. It's difficult to see how love can survive without synergy even accepting the fact that God FIRST loved us. We must return and pour forth that very same Love that He has for us in order to be saved.

The form of the deformity

The result of this unfaced internal contradiction in the west is an unbelievable "God" who is more of an arbitrary despot than a loving Heavenly Father. We should not be at all amazed that western people have deserted this desiccated dangerous "God" in their millions. This spirituality, obsessed with the piety of death rather than the song of resurrection, has seriously disabled the western Church and its mission. The whole apparatus of its enforcement has now collapsed as the Protestant revolt against its malign and death dealing autocracy has unstitched the Body of Christ into thousands of fragments. The only Christianity that the unchurched feel comfortable with is a composite of individual feelings and opinions. The Church doesn't enter into the picture at all.

My protagonist then gave me a challenge:-

"If there is any substance to this description, is it unique to western Christianity or do any of these three conditions exist in other "Christianities"?"

I replied:-

Orthodoxy has many faults. We often bicker with each other. We are often imprisoned in our own national and ethnic preoccupations. Some of us have lost the hunger for mission. On the other hand, many Orthodox haven't and what unites us all is our resolute adherence and living out of the conviction that in God there is ONLY Love and the Infinite Creative and Recreating Power of that Love. We create hell. We sustain death. We wallow in our sufferings. God does NONE of these things.

Now I am well aware that there are millions and millions of orthodox (lower case) Christians in the west and always have been. Sometimes these Christians have had an enormous impact for good by staying in their churches and living (albeit incompletely) the Orthodox Christian life ... but I have to be honest. Orthodoxy, (like Roman Catholicism, albeit in a different manner), does not say that our Church is merely one amongst many and it doesn't matter which individual church you belong to because "we are all one anyway," (which is palpably untrue), or that each church is merely a "different flavour." We believe that there are issues of truth and life here. We are committed to ecumenical dialogue not merely because we want to be friends but because we truly want to be one in faith and life. Nothing less is worthy of the "One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church."

The Meeting of the Lord **by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann**

"Forty days after Christmas, parishes of the Orthodox Church celebrate the Meeting of the Lord. Since it usually falls on a weekday, this feast is half-forgotten, but nonetheless this is when the Church completes 'the time of Christmas,' revealing and recapitulating the full meaning of Christmas in a stream of pure and profound joy. The feast commemorates and contemplates an event recorded in the gospel of Saint Luke. Forty days after the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary, keeping to the religious practice of that time, 'brought the child to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord as it is written in the law of the Lord...' (Luke 2:22, 23). The gospel continues,

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout...and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel.' And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword shall pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.' (Luke 2:26-35)

How striking and beautiful an image, the old man holding the child in his arms, and how strange are his words: 'For my eyes have seen thy salvation...' Pondering these words we begin to appreciate the depth of this event and its relationship to us, to me, to our faith. Is anything in the world more joyful than an encounter, a 'meeting' with someone you love?

Truly, to live is to await, to look forward to the encounter. Isn't Simeon's transcendent and beautiful anticipation a symbol of expectation, this elderly man who spends his whole life waiting for the light which illumines all and the joy which fills everything with itself? And how unexpected, how unspeakably good that the long-awaited light and joy comes to the elderly Simeon through a child! Imagine the old man's trembling hands as he takes in his arms the forty-day old infant so tenderly and carefully, his eyes gazing on the tiny being and filling with an outpouring of praise: 'Now, You may let me depart in peace, for I have seen, I have held in my arms, I have embraced the very meaning of life.'

Simeon waited. He waited his entire long life, and surely this means he pondered, he prayed, he deepened as he waited, so that in the end his whole life was one continuous 'eve' of a joyful meeting. Isn't it time that we ask ourselves, what am I waiting for? What does my heart keep reminding me about more and more insistently? Is this life of mine gradually being transformed into anticipation, as I look forward to encountering the essential? These are the questions the Meeting poses.

Here, in this feast, human life is revealed as the surpassing beauty of a maturing soul, increasingly liberated, deepened and cleansed of all that is petty, meaningless and incidental. Even aging and demise, the earthly destiny we all share, are so simply and convincingly shown here to be growth and ascent toward that one moment when with all my heart, in the fullness of thanksgiving, I say: 'let me now depart.' I have seen the light which permeates the world. I have seen the Child, who brings the world so much divine love and who gives himself to me. Nothing is feared, nothing is unknown, all is now peace, thanksgiving and love. This is what the Meeting of the Lord brings. It celebrates the soul meeting Love, meeting the one who gave me life and gave me strength to transfigure it into anticipation."

Fr. Alexander wrote this sermon just two weeks before his death.

[Taken from, "Celebration of Faith" Sermons, Vol. 2 "The Church Year" by the late Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann, 1994]

A Christian Jihad?

by Fr. Gregory

"Let us charge into the good fight with joy and love without being afraid of our enemies. Though unseen themselves, they can look at the face of our soul, and if they see it altered by fear, they take up arms against us all the more fiercely. For the cunning creatures have observed that we are scared. So let us take up arms against them courageously. No one will fight with a resolute fighter."

St. John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent.

Great Lent is nearly upon us and our minds turn to spiritual discipline. Sometimes, amidst the practical concerns of living out the Church's life in the world and for God at this time we can neglect the goal of our striving. It is simply, by grace, to conquer ourselves, or at least that part of ourselves that is not wholly aligned with God, (which for most of us is most of us!) In this sense we can rightly practice a Christian jihad but our enemies are not other people be they heretics or infidels but ourselves. St. John Climacus directs our attention to this in the quotation from "The Ladder" (above).

The "enemies" of the soul are many and varied ... our passions (in the patristic sense of that word ... distorted misdirected desires and movements of the soul), the devil, the Old Adam just to name a few. It's interesting that St. John focuses on "fear." It is fear in the face of our enemies that redoubles the power of our assailants. Fear paralyses our resolve and our actions. Fear says:- "you can't do this ... the task is too great you will be overcome." This little voice is demonic. If we cave into to its suggestions then all the grace our soul could have received for the battle is dissipated in self concern and depression.

God expects us to be bold, to fight, to trust his power to defend, transform and save. Nothing is achieved by a weak will and some have falsely assumed that the will, being held in bondage to the enemy can achieve nothing. The disastrous consequences of this teaching, (often found in the Protestant churches), has, unwittingly, perhaps enfeebled the Christian mind. Either it has led to a dark and gloomy spirituality (in the manner of Kirkegaard) or a rejection of God outright and the autonomy of the human (in the manner of Nietzsche). By contrast, Orthodoxy teaches the synergy of the human and divine will ... both God and man fighting for the same goal, the deification of the human and through humankind, the transformation of the whole of creation, (Romans 8:21).

So, brothers and sisters, with boldness in divine grace, let us prepare to fight the good fight! May God steer us safely through this Great Lent to the glorious joy of Pascha!

Fr. Gregory

Another Turbulent Priest!

by Fr. Gregory

Dr. Edward Norman is not a very popular Anglican priest in the UK. Apart from the fact that he writes regularly for what is perceived to be a "right-wing" newspaper, (The Daily Telegraph), and there can be no worse crime than that in some circles; he regularly prods the liberal Christian establishment for what he perceives to be its pulling down of the historic Christian landmarks in this country. The Pope has done much the same in strongly criticising the European Union for its secular, politically correct editing out of the role of the Christian Church in the formation of modern Europe, east and west. Although Orthodox thinking through of the consequences of this analysis will be radically different than that of the Protestant or Catholic churches, we may welcome these timely wake up calls. Norman's recent article in the Daily Telegraph stirred up a hornet's nest on controversy on the Discussion Board I frequent. I was (and am) virtually alone in defending his analysis in the midst of my fellow Christians most of whom just dismiss him as a reactionary, nostalgic ranter. (I wonder how some of these people would have coped with the likes of the Prophet Hosea who lambasted his country for spiritual harlotry and called Israel back to its first love of the Lord in the desert?!)

As this editorial I offer the following commentary which was published recently in our parish newsletter. I invite your comments. Don't spare the horses if you think I have lost the plot! (See "leave a message" link on the front page).

Commentary

Norman talks about the "ethicism" of "19th century Freethinkers." By this he means those Christian writers who redesigned Jesus to be an ethical teacher or prophet alone. In this they share much with Islam but the root of their approach is the 18th Century Enlightenment when everything had to become cool and "reasonable" without either divine intervention, miracle or human transformation. This is the "Jesus-the-good-man" approach.

The effect of this teaching concerning the person of Jesus Christ on the western Christian mind has been devastating. Jesus just becomes one instance of many other sublime ethical teachers from Confucius to Guru Nanak. Why should Jesus mean anything to anyone who thinks that they are already as “good” and “enlightened” as him? For those with greater idealism, Jesus can be looked up to, followed, but he can never become an agent of revolutionary change in either human life or the life of society.

Social change under this Christ becomes the province of politicians and legislators. “Question Time” on BBC1 reflects this approach. Nearly all the social questions (which predominate) are addressed to politicians. Occasionally one might see a token bishop or rabbi on the panel; but these rarely deviate from the secular notions of their colleagues. God is reserved for the God slot. Even then, as on “Thought for the Day,” * God rarely gets a mention except as a rubber stamp for some other preconceived idea about “the good life.” (* a radio religious slot on the BBC)

For Orthodoxy this means that we must be “rude” about God. When others think it impolite to mention Him in “mixed company” (ie., with non-believers present) we must do so, quite naturally and unaffectedly. When we feel embarrassed about our faith we must exorcise this fear and be confident about it. Yes, we must listen, but there also comes a time for speech, a time to stand up and be counted.

Edward Norman’s main point though concerns the tendency of many Christians and “pub prophets,” (people who like to think they know a lot about things of which they know little) to devise a Christianity which suits themselves and leaves out all the uncomfortable or inconvenient bits. Time and time again I come across in my teaching in schools; children for example who claim to be Christians but who then wax lyrical about reincarnation and how it makes so much sense. We may see the same trend in the churches ... Faith in the City, the Call to the North and the Decade of Evangelism ** ... where have all these worthy programmes gone? What has been their fruit? Has there been a revival in the Christian Church? No. Why? Because so often these schemes were not about Evangelism or Christian Social action at all. They merely encouraged people to do things which never got done because the experience and message wasn’t often there in the heart to start with. The world has had enough of 5 year plans, 10 year schemes and the like. What it needs is to hear from the likes of you and me are answers to the following questions - here’s 20 to be going on with:- (** various Anglican renewal programs of the 80's and 90's)

Can I know God?

Does he care for me?

Who is Jesus?

What has he done for me?

How can I become a Christian?

What do Christians believe about evil, sin, suffering and death?

How can you believe when there is so much suffering around us?

Hasn’t science disproved Christianity?

Do miracles really happen?

Could miracles really happen for me? Does God heal?

What will it “cost” me to become a Christian? (This is not about money of course; it’s about the cross)?

Is there anything in my life that God would want me to change if I became a Christian?

How can I pray? What should I expect?

Who will help me grow as a Christian? What should I do to help this?

What does Christianity teach about poverty? sexuality? marriage? justice? creation? war and peace? genetics? money?

What will happen when I die?

What should I tell my children about God?

Should I have my children baptised or should I "let them make their own minds up?"

What's the point of the Church? Do I have to go to Church to be a Christian? Why can't I worship God at home?

Do I need to know about Christian beliefs? Can't I just try to be a good person?

When ordinary Christians feel confident to address at least some of these questions we shall make progress. When all Christians see themselves as missionaries (which is not the same as evangelists!) we shall make progress. When Christians stop trying to reinvent the wheel and start to trust the accumulated wisdom of the Church, we shall make progress. Orthodox Christians have no special cause for complacency here. For a Church that insists on conserving its Tradition and making that known in each generation the riches that it has received from God, even greater things will be expected. Let's get out there and pray, work and sacrifice for the Kingdom of God!

Fr. Gregory

"Pray for the Peace of Bethlehem"

You know that things have got to a bad state when gunmen take refuge from an invading army in the grounds of the Church where Christ was born. This is the situation even as I write this article now at my computer. Once again the Holy Land becomes unholy through the actions of sinful men and women.

I belong to (essentially) a Palestinian Church so I suppose I am bound to have a different "take" on this than, say, many American Protestant Christians who regard the creation of the State of Israel as a fulfilment of prophecy. Whatever Zionism is it is not the fulfilment of divine prophecy! The State of Israel was founded as an aggressively secular State. It has only become as pseudo-theocratic entity through the rise of right wing religious fanaticism in Israel

There can be no justification for the removal of Palestinians, Muslims and Christians alike, from a homeland that had been theirs for 1400 and 2000 years respectively. We know why this happened in 1948. The west, (rightly), had a conscience about the Holocaust. However, in trying to expiate this guilt it only succeeded in creating a new evil to threaten world peace ... a dispossessed and voiceless people.

You can't undo history ... but you can redeem it; heal its wounds. Most Palestinians now realise that they cannot roll back the clock to 1948. Arguably though we should insist that Israel gets out of the West Bank and Gaza in exchange for security within her borders and the end to violence on BOTH

sides. This was of course the Saudi peace plan brokered at the Arab Summit in Beirut whilst I was there on pilgrimage at the end of March. Note that this solution was summarily dismissed by Israel.

There can be no peace in the Middle East without justice and that means a Palestinian State and an Israeli State with agreed borders and mutually security. Most Jews know this; most Arabs know this. It will take men and women of uncommon stature and courage to work to achieve it. What is needful now is a measure of trust on both sides before this senseless bloodbath gets any worse. Trust is something in the political sphere not to do with feelings alone but with human decency and the will. Those "sons of God" who will work in this way for peace and justice are needed now if never before.

Fr. Gregory

CHRIST IS RISEN!

Why is it that Great and Holy Pascha becomes ever more great and ever more glorious year on year? What is it about orthodox worship that inspires us to fall down before our Lord, in penitence and faith, with prostrations and veneration? Is it the real sense of His presence among us? The beauty of holiness?

This year, throughout Lent and Holy Week, we were blessed with many more people attending the services including many ethnic groups, with a diversity of cultural backgrounds and many different languages all on the same journey to the Kingdom. A pilgrimage of faith preparing for the joy of today's Paschal feast.

It surely must be well pleasing in the sight of our Lord to have us witness the fruits of the Spirit in this place. It is especially good to have so very many children among us praying and singing praises together.

At the major services this year 50 to 60 people of all ages and many nationalities brought to our worship new inspiration, enthusiasm and hope.

As Fr. Gregory said, at about 1.15 a.m. this morning, after the long procession of people crowded back into the church, many of us with our candles still lit on this beautifully mild and still Spring night:-

“We are an Easter people and Orthodox Christians can never know fear, for Christ is with us.”

We become accustomed in orthodoxy to matins being sung in the evening and vespers in the morning, but today Fr. Gregory announced that we could go home for a few hours sleep before matins. Our Cantor must have been glad to give rest to his voice which miraculously seems to gain in strength and expression throughout the long devotions day by day.

We return early to church to prepare the feast and then to sing the revised version of Paschal Matins which, I am pleased to say, is very much more joyful than the one used in previous years.

For myself I find the service of Holy Unction on Wednesday evening to be the highlight of Holy Week. The service takes place in the centre of the nave and the church is dimly lit. One feels the awful sense of responsibility of the priest as he says the prayers of preparation before the Gospel book. Seven Epistles and seven Gospels are read interspersed with prayers and censing. As we light our candles for the reading of the Gospels the sense of awe increases until we reach the end when all of us are finally anointed with the holy oil on forehead and hands. This sacrament of healing of soul and body prepares

us spiritually and physically for the days ahead taking us through to today, the Sunday of Pascha, where we witness the outpouring of God's love for us and for each other in the fellowship of the feast.

From Forgiveness Sunday Vespers when we sing:-

“Let us enter the Fast with joy, O faithful that we all may be made worthy to see the passion of Christ our God and His Holy Pascha, rejoicing with Spiritual joy”.

We can now say, “This we have done, this we have seen.”

We pray that our Orthodox Christian churches everywhere may continue to grow in strength, in prayer, in peace and in love throughout the world for –

INDEED, CHRIST IS RISEN!

Glory to You our God, Glory to You

Dwynwen

Who's Where in British Orthodox Saints?

My wife accused me of being a "liturgical fidget". Of course, she never met Fr. Gregory or she would have recognised that he was in the Premier League in this game.

The latest liturgical fidget from Willis Road is a two-page effort concerning the saints commemorated at Matins. True, the actual saints commemorated aren't much altered, but the name of their local team has now been incorporated, so we now know for which Theodore or Oswald we are shouting.

Archbishops of Canterbury abound (strange, isn't it, that the Orthodox Church shows much more interest in them than the Anglicans do?) with seven entries; York and London come next with three each, followed by Winchester and Rome(!) with two apiece, and finally Lichfield and Worcester both have one.

The ladies do quite well with a full team of eleven plus, of course, St. Mary the Theotokos, as overall Captain. Always these days we have to make sure we are being religiously correct and so amongst a great mass of Anglo-Saxons, there are five Celtic men for balance, plus St. Dwynwen who is included with the ladies. St Ninian in that list was a Brit and not a Celt.

One or two place names will raise eyebrows, so a word about some of the obscure ones may help. King Oswald of Northumbria is described as being of "Heavenfield" which is near Chollerford beside Hadrian's Wall. It was the field where he won a decisive victory which opened the way for the evangelism of the North. On the west coast Saint Bega is said to be of "Copeland". There does not appear to be a village now of this name, but there is on the map the Forest of Copeland beside West Water in the Lake District. St Bega is really the same name as St Bee's -- whose Head or village are also in Cumbria

Crowland, is the home of two on our list:- SS Guthlac and Theodore (who is not the same as the Archbishop of that name nor the Bookstore), but the village is still there near Market Deeping in Lincolnshire and is very well worth a visit. St Edith's town, Wilton, is not far from Salisbury in Wiltshire. Two of the places mentioned have their names slightly changed today. St Mildred's Minster refers to Minster-in-Thanet in Kent whereas St. Milburgh's home is now referred to as "Much Wenlock" in Shropshire. One village which is no longer visible, except at very low tide, is Dunwich off the Suffolk coast, not far from St. Felix's pad at Felixstowe.

St Ninian aforementioned established his see at Whithorn in Galloway and is regarded as the apostle of the Picts. He built what St Bede called "Candida Casa" = "the white house" and indeed white stones have been discovered on the site. The languages spoken by the above English saints cover most of our ancestral tongues. People who mistakenly think that to be Orthodox you must be Greek-speaking will be surprised to note that only Theodore of Tarsus, the 8th Archbishop of Canterbury (688-690), was a native Greek and found all our languages just as difficult as I find his. But he was a great Pastor who laid important foundations for the English Church.

There are sixty-six names on our list and they are all celebrated each Sunday together, with those who appear on that day in our calendar, and we rightly rejoice with them and for them. They are our Orthodox inheritance, and we bear in mind the important words of St Arsenios of Paros (+1877) who proclaimed:-

"Only when the Church in the British Isles begins to venerate her own saints will she start to grow".

St Paul insisted that we are all called to be saints, (I Corinthians: 1.2) and our fellow-countrymen and women of the undivided Church look forward to some 21st century additions to the list -- for example ?????? of Levenshulme and ?????? of Stockport. The task of filling up those blanks I must leave to YOU.

Fr. John-Mark

Time Bomb in Asia

The face-off between India and Pakistan is probably the most dangerous situation the world has faced since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. There is much comment about the details of the situation but not much about the wider issues.

Kashmir has, of course, been a running sore on the Indian sub-continent for decades. India and Pakistan have been to (conventional) war over it a number of times before. Now, of course the stand off is made much more dangerous by both sides having nuclear weapons and both, rightly in my view, despising the racism and hypocrisy of the west in trying to restrict the technology to those deemed less worthy or capable of handling it. The anti-proliferation treaty is now effectively dead in the water. But even this is not the main issue the free world faces.

The crucial aspect here is that "others" are using this conflict for their own ends. India is right to complain against cross border terrorism but her case is morally weak if only on account of her appalling treatment of Muslims in Gujarat. Neither factor justifies the other but it does stop both from trying to capture the "moral high ground." Behind all of this are those who want to expand the sphere of Islamist fundamentalist theocracy into non-Muslim lands. We can see this happening in the southern Philippines, in Indonesia, in southern Sudan, Northern Nigeria and many other places. Al-Qaeda is now using Pakistan as a "port of convenience" from which to expand south. This does not mean that the west should line up behind India. The last thing we want is to hand another propaganda victory to those who want to portray the west as new "crusaders" against Islam. On the other hand we can't sit back and do nothing either.

What about the UN? Why is it so quiet in all of this? Are we really reduced in the 21st Century to shuttle diplomacy? Assuming that this paper beastly really has lost its teeth perhaps we should now mobilise the world economy against both countries and cut them loose. Massive economic sanctions, however, would probably only hurt India. Sadam Hussein has shown how long he can survive on Arab world support alone. India does not have such a network. Perhaps we can get through this one by turning up the pressure on both governments politically.

Prayer is a vital weapon also. World peace has never seemed so fragile as it does now. If and when the dust (temporarily) settles on this conflict, a fresh look at the United Nations is in order. Europe must

push for its reinvigouration. Left to America, which in recent times has barely concealed its contempt for the organisation, the world will remain a very dangerous place. There is only one superpower now and too much depends on one country's self interest. Only a global commitment to the effective policing of international disputes will save the day if not for the planet and humankind as a whole.

Fr. Gregory

Saint Simon and St. Jude

(a sermon on All Saints Day 2002)

Today is our All Saints' Day and it is also the synaxis of the Holy, Glorious and All-Praised Twelve Apostles. Synaxis there means "drawing together," that is, its the time when we thank God for them all -- as a team, so to speak.

My interest lies, usually, with the under-dog. We all know that many of the apostles get a fair amount of exposure in Church during the year but two, or maybe three, of them hardly get another mention apart from their allotted feast day. The two I suspect who are bottom of the list are SS Simon and Jude and perhaps you'll allow me to try to right the balance for them today.

St. John doesn't tell us in his gospel who the couple being married were at the famous wedding feast at Cana of Galilee but tradition asserts it was a kinsman of Jesus, our St Simon, and this explains why the Lord was present, as well as His Blessed Mother and other members of His family.. The troparion for the feast day of St Simon tells us that Jesus did more that turn water into wine on that occasion. In addition it says, He turned Simon's heart into that of a zealot for Christ.

There are others in the New Testament called "Zealots" but this seems to refer to membership of an extremist political party, dedicated to driving out the Roman occupiers by force -- a scenario in Palestine not unfamiliar to us today. Judas Iscariot was called a Zealot and sometimes it is also claimed that another Zealot was Barabbas whom Pilate released on Good Friday instead of Jesus.

Certainly the politicised Zealots were a power in the land in the Lord's day, but there is no evidence that St Simon was one of them. He was termed a Zealot, perhaps partly in fun to begin with, simply because, at sometime after the miraculous events of his marriage feast, he left his bride and home and family for the love of Christ, wedding his soul, as the troparion says, to the Heavenly Bridegroom. St Simon is also called "the Canaanite", and this just describes his place of origin.

If St Simon showed his zeal in leaving his home at the command of Christ, he certainly qualified for the title during his life's ministry because of the extent of his preaching tours. These went as far as the North Eastern shores of the Black Sea; north Africa and one historian of about the year 300 claimed that he also came to Britain. It is for this reason that Fr Andrew Phillips included him in the list of pioneers of English Christianity which we celebrate at Matins every Sunday. Other authorities claim that he was martyred in Persia with St Jude. Another tradition claims that he was martyred during his progress round the Black Sea. Only with certainty can we claim that, starting with youth on his side, he was much travelled apostle.

What of St Jude? He ought to be better known than he is, if only because he has a short, but much neglected, epistle in our NT. It is the last of all the letters, and verse 3 is often quoted by Orthodox scholars. St Jude says:-- "I found it necessary to write appealing to you -- to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"

Again, St Jude was a kinsman of our Lord but his modesty forbade him to claim this. Instead he begins

his letter by describing himself as “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and the brother of James”. This was the James who became the first Bishop in Jerusalem and was chairman of the Council described in Acts 15.

The cause of this humility on the part of Jude is because at first he, like others of the Lord’s family, did not believe in Him during the early days of His ministry (Jn.7.5) . Also he accused himself of lacking brotherly love towards Jesus as a Child. In the Gospel Jude is referred to by St Matthew as “Thaddaeus” a nick-name which means “he who renders praise”. He is also called Labbaeus which signifies “ardent”.

From all this we get a picture of another who was a zealous apostle for the Lord. He preached in Palestine first and then went to Arabia, Syria and Mesopotamia. It is claimed that St Jude ended his life in what is now Turkey, being martyred near Mount Ararat

SS Peter & Paul are regarded as the Co-Founders of the Church of Antioch and also of the one in Rome. Both of these places were important for non-religious reasons before their time and that helped the Christian pioneers to become well-known, but there is nothing wrong in that. Other apostles chose to go, or were sent, to backwaters of the Roman Empire and preach the Gospel there in comparative obscurity. This was no less important to the over-all mission of Christ’s Church and is yet another reminder, should we still need one, that there are more saints known to God than there are known to men. And it is really those unknown to us whom we commemorate, first of all, on All Saints’ Day.

In the twilight between those who are well known saints and Church leaders, and the unknown army commemorated on All Saints Day, are the thousands of lesser, but just- remembered saints, who did their bit for God and his Kingdom in their own place and in their own time, and amongst them are SS Simon and Jude.

It is not without importance for us that St Paul begins two of his major letters by reminding his readers that we are all “called to be saints”(Romans 1:7 & I Corinthians1:2) In order to achieve this, we still have, as St Jude points out, to “contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”(v.3).

Fr. John-Mark Titterington

Uncomfortable Hope and Comfortable Despair

A deadly cloud has settled over our islands. No, this isn't a release of toxic pollutants, rather something which darkens and poisons the soul. This toxic cloud is called despair. Now, I don't mean clinical depression; I mean a collective spiritual depression engendering fatalism and lethargy. As such it's a rather comfortable despair for many people, sometimes rationalised with plausible arguments and high minded sentiments. Here are some examples:-

"Well, I don't really like the idea of identity cards really; but I suppose we've got to have them. Most other European nations have them after all."

"You can't do anything with delinquent youngsters nowadays. You just get a mouthful of abuse. Leave well alone."

"Like it or lump it; that's just me. Why should I change? It's impossible."

"Nothing like that could work in our church. We tried things like that for years. They never work."

"Well I suppose we've got to do it really. You have to keep up with the times don't you? What can little old me do to change things. Go with the flow; that's what I say."

It is true that many people feel powerless today in the face of what they see as inexorable change. It's not that everyone sees these changes as for the better but it's more comfortable to blot it out and get on with your life and just acquiesce anyway by inaction.

Orthodox Christians must never fall into this trap. We are most certainly not powerless. We are part of an international body of believers that since Pentecost has been turning the world upside down. We took on the Roman Empire and won. We took on slavery and won. We took on poverty, disease and ignorance in the name of Christ and won. Or rather, God won through us.

Where is our vision and our faith if we cave in to this sense of powerlessness, this comfortable paralysis of despair? No, for us we have that gloriously uncomfortable hope that changes the world itself ... the gospel of Christ. In season and out of season we must let that gospel seize our minds, fill our hearts and nerve our wills. We must go out into this world and expect great things from God acting in and through our collective labour. Now is not the time to sit back but to stride forward and do battle with everything that opposes the will of God in human life. It is not a calling for the fainthearted. It is a calling for those actively trust in a power not of their own or of any human devising but of God. He will not fail us ... if we are prepared to trust Him and act.

Fr. Gregory

Stewards of Creation



Few people might judge the Johannesburg Earth Summit to be an outstanding success not least because the largest energy consumer and richest country in the world stood back from it all ... America of course. We should perhaps qualify that and say the American Government as many Americans are as just as exercised about this as anyone else. The other global participants on this sustainable development conference, not unsurprisingly perhaps, failed to gather round a common agenda and purpose. We just don't as yet have the political will and structures to tame the economic disparities and ecological damage being caused by the global human economy to this planet and its fractious peoples. However, humans created this system and it remains their responsibility before God both to reform and manage it for the common good.

In Genesis the Adamic priesthood for creation is that of an active steward. Humans are called to work with and not against nature so that we can remain worthy of this fragile blue jewel in the cosmic sea,

the earth. Our world is not passive in all of this. If we disfigure her, she will reject us and make our life hard and miserable. This will be God's judgement for our abject failure to act as good stewards of HIS creation.

At the beginning of the Church's Year, (1st September), the Orthodox Church celebrates the Environment as God's creation and gift to us. Orthodox ecological concerns and action are, happily, well known. Less understood is what drives those concerns and that vision. As always, this has to do with our theology. It is not simply that we believe in a Creator God ... that is hardly exceptional amongst the peoples of the world. Orthodox Christology, our belief in Christ as God-Man and Saviour is tied up with ecological and cosmic concerns as well. This is most striking as soon as one enters a traditionally designed Orthodox temple, (church). High on the dome over the nave is Christ Pantocrator, the Lord over all creation.



He looks down over his world with a gaze of infinite love and creative power. Likewise, the Holy Spirit, the life creating Spirit descends on the people and the Holy Gifts and makes of them a New Creation in his death destroying resurrection. The Cosmic Christ of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is the Christ of the "pleroma," ... the fulness, (Ephesians 1:15-23). There is no place in the whole of the Cosmos from which Christ is absent. He fills all with the intention of resurrecting all into newness of life. Our relationship with and to Christ as Orthodox Christians is not a "me-and-God-contract." It is a relationship which enhances and affirms our connectedness to and dependence on all things. We are not plucked out of the world into some sort of mystical corner to be alone with God. We are with God in a New Creation, a New Creation not just of human transformation but of transfiguration for the whole of creation of which we are inextricably part. The only possible response within this holistic relationship is to fulfil our priestly calling to be co-creators, serving the One Ultimate Creator of all. We need humility to see our place in the scheme of things and obedience to work actively according to our calling.

In Europe at the turn of the First Millennium, Church architecture began to change. Northern European Orthodox churches until this time never had domes or cupolas even. This was partly due to the relative poverty of the northern part of the Roman and post-Roman Empire in the early centuries. This factor was amply compensated by Orthodox Celtic and Saxon spirituality which was wholly earth-ground and earth-centred. The churches that served this faith were simple structures of wood and sometimes stone. They had an intimate connected feel not only to and for the local community but within their local environment. The design was indicative of that common Orthodox spirituality of creation. The monasteries functioned as Christian leaven within society; gardens of Eden where ordinary folk could feel restored to the primal beauty of creation and of each other. To this day still, Orthodox monasteries are thought of as gardens, (Athos in particular as the Garden of the Theotokos), and salvation a return to Eden.

At the turn of the Millennium, however, the Normans and the Franks began to build their vast cathedrals and these have so dominated the European idea of a "grand church" that few people reflect on what was lost with the new style. Of course, many of these cathedrals are beautiful and grand but, to Orthodox eyes, it is a cold beauty, a lifeless thing, an impressive statement but little more. Such a sentiment may be shocking to the reader but it is true for us. We have a different way of looking at things.

Have you read William Golding's masterpiece, "The Spire"? (1964). Golding chronicles the obsessive desire of Dean Jocelyn to build a 400 foot spire to eclipse all others on the tower of Salisbury Cathedral. Like so many of Golding's powerful novels, this is a story of the baleful and destructive consequences of human pride; here, verging on insanity. The medieval Church builders wanted to storm heaven itself, reach up to heaven and pull God down. Far from being an act of praise to the Creator such structures were symbols of an unregenerate desire to subdue. This unclean spirit permeated the Christian mind so often in succeeding centuries. The Medieval Church attempted to subdue human freedom, subdue the secular order and inspired by this self same spirit Europe colonised the world subduing ancient cultures in the name of Christ. Of course, there were voices of protest. The Jesuits defended the rights and culture of the indigenous peoples of South America. The Reformation tried to change the direction of the western Church to a greater spirit of humility; but the genie was out of the bottle. As soon as economies, nations and sciences broke free from the grip of the Church they also continued the process of subduing all things before them, including of course, God himself, subdued to the spirit of rationality in the Enlightenment, but eventually of course merely a subordination of the divine to the market, to capital or to revolutionary fervour. The final victim of these inexorable conquests was the Earth herself. In the 19th and well into the 20th century, progress was synonymous with human control. We look back now at these times and find now in our clenched fists merely dust; the dust of poverty and neglect, of global wars and ecological catastrophe. It has to stop.

Now, we must get practical. Let's be realistic first. The Church cannot hope to match the power of international corporations and globalisation on their own ground. Many of these global corporations have turnovers exceeding the Gross Domestic Product of developing countries. Some governments are now looking exceedingly weak in their shadows particularly since political funding has bought off many a politician and national leader. People do have power though BOTH to subvert the evils and at the same time defend the good inherent in these systems. This power resides in our place as consumers, shareholders, educators of our children and, where possible, voters at elections. If we let ourselves be overcome by a paralysing sense of powerlessness we both miss these opportunities and judge ourselves as part of the problem and not its solution. Furthermore, we do not have to act alone and nor should we. There are scores of organisations out there working for sustainable development and ecological care that we can join in good conscience and work with. Having said all that we must not disqualify our message with our lives. It's no use protesting at the waste of energy inherent in our car economy if we drive to work without giving someone a lift. We can't protest at the abuse of resources through over-packaging unless we start to avoid plastic, hermetically sealed immaculate products and go fresh, natural and simple. These are day to day decisions. We must take responsibility for them.

It will be a long and upward struggle to save ourselves and our planet. God is watching what we do though with His world and with each other. The stakes are now very high not least because it is our global home that is now at risk. Orthodox theology and praxis must continue to inform everything that we believe think and do towards this end. We must not abandon our role as priests of God's New Creation.

Fr. Gregory

Aidan and Amos Compared

We know very little about the life of St Aidan and what we do know all comes from the writings of St Bede. He arrived in the north of England from Iona about 635AD and helped by the King, Oswald, set about re-building the Christian Church in the Kingdom of Northumbria. Under God's guidance, his fervour, courage and consideration, he had a good deal of success and his monument was the founding of the Bishopric of Lindisfarne.

In many ways his life and work reflected that of the Prophet Amos who also worked in a Kingdom where the worship of the true God had been undermined, not by warfare, but by the twin evils of luxury and corruption. Amos preached at Bethel in Israel, and must have sounded a bit like a fiery preacher from the Orkney let loose in a modern-day London or New York.

Amos was active in the seventh century BC and Aidan in the 7th century AD. In the end, Amos was up-staged as a prophet by the school of Isaiah. In a similar way, Aidan was eclipsed by Bishop Cuthbert and this, probably, explains why we know so little of him. It is noteworthy that there is only one ancient parish church dedicated to him in England, and that is on the coast near Lindisfarne at Bamburgh. The rest are modern, like our own.

Amos described himself as a shepherd and a tender of sycamore trees -- in other words, a real countryman. This probably would also describe Aidan the Irishman before he went to Iona, and both of them had something passionate to say about serving a "Creator God" who is Lord over all the peoples of the earth.

But there is one big difference between the main thrust of their preaching. Aidan had to contend with a people who had been evangelised at some time in the past but through warfare had lost the faith. Amos faced a people who were outwardly sticking to the faith of their fathers while their hearts and minds were occupied with other things. So Amos is concerned to preach righteousness and justice and to bringing an end to apostasy and corruption. Different objects, certainly, but both were pursued with equal zeal. God, Amos declares, has set His face against evil, and in the end, evil will be destroyed. Amos was the first to point out that God's own people were not part of the answer to the world's sin, but were really the main part of the problem.

But all is not doom and gloom with the Prophet. He vividly tells the story of a shepherd coming to find his flock devastated by a lion and all that is left are scattered bones and one ear. Yet Amos sees a hint of salvation in this image -- "so will Israel be saved", he says. The Prophet Isaiah uses this same picture, which he calls "a remnant" and so, for the prophets generally, "remnant" becomes a sign of God's incredible patience in not destroying His people. It tells us that God will be willing to start again with a ragbag of survivors. Micah says outright that God can even make the lame a nucleus of a nation (Mic 5.6). So the prophets, starting with Amos, used this idea of a remnant to point forward to the God who one day would raise a dead Messiah and a dead people to triumphant life again. And in this the aims of both Amos and Aidan, fourteen hundred years apart, are similar,

The major world wars of the 20th century undermined the prevailing Christian infrastructure of Europe and in losing our faith as a nation and we can appreciate that St Aidan's situation in Northumbria was similar to ours today.

But in spite of the warfare, the 20th century brought other great changes to Western life-styles through material development, thanks largely to the invention of electricity, the development of the internal combustion engine, and latterly, of the micro-chip. Through the development and distribution of these inventions, wealth has been created which the welfare state has used to try to drive away the abject poverty of previous centuries. In this, the state has not been completely successful and we are told that the rich have in fact become richer and the poor, poorer. If this is true, then our situation today is also a replica of the one which the Prophet Amos faced.

He insisted that not only the world of worship, but also the world of work and leisure matter to God. Economic injustice is as serious as insincere worship. Owing houses lined with ivory was the height of

luxury, but Amos predicts that they will collapse. God will judge the ostentatious life-styles of the rich, who contravene God's law by turning a blind eye to the needs of the poor. The Prophet says, God swears by "his Holiness"(4.2) and no oath could be stronger or more solemn

He may have operated seven centuries before Christ, but like all the prophets, he pointed forward to the great day of His Coming when God would show just how far He was prepared to go in order to judge sin and save sinners. That day has come and was faithfully preached by Aidan and all the faithful Celtic monks. They stressed that not only is the cross of Christ the greatest condemnation of sin, but at the same time, the greatest revelation of grace. Both could re-echo St Paul's words:" Where sin increased, grace increased all the more"(Rom.5.20) and we, a latter-day remnant, must take our cue from the prophets and the saints of old and proclaim "a straight God in a bent world; a passionate God in an indifferent world, and an inescapable God in an escapist world." (S. Hughes) And we must glory too, in the prophets who foretold, and saints who faithfully preached Christ crucified, yet risen, ascended and glorified. And we can thank God that on our feast-day, we can still proclaim:--

All honour and glory, O Christ our God, be unto Your Holy Name, now and for ever.

Fr. John-Mark Titterington

Feet of Clay

Why are we so surprised when politicians and other leaders in society are shown to have "feet of clay" like each one of us? The British press have been indulging in a feeding frenzy recently at the revelations of the private life of a former UK prime minister who committed adultery. It's his wife I felt sorry for; certainly not the "kiss and tell" novelist who sprung the story.

The reactions of the public as usual have been varied. The tabloid mentality of course always wants to dish and see the dirt. It can only do this of course by promoting the idea that the public as a whole have higher standards ... which, of course, it doesn't. Then there is the cynicism that will impute all sorts of wicked motives to politicians ignoring the fact that most of them try to serve their country well whilst at the same time trying to deal with their sins and weaknesses as we all have to do. The centre left broadsheets of course have been ever so slightly pompous about the architect of "Back to Basics" not practising what he preached. We are all to some extent hypocrites ... journalists alike. Which of us would make ourselves vulnerable by an outstanding example of public honesty about our interior life and our relationships? Very few I suspect.

Maybe the French have got it right that it should be illegal to trash public figures for their private lives, weaknesses and sins. This would deprive an increasingly voyeuristic public of much of their sordid entertainment and that would be no bad thing. It might even allow all of us to be more honest about ourselves before rushing to criticise others. We all have feet of clay.

Fr. Gregory

Let's Keep Bad Company

I do hope that we are all keeping bad company as Christians! What an atrocious statement some might object. Surely, Christians should have nothing to do with sinners and sinful situations. Just as Our Lord I suppose who ate with tax collectors and prostitutes and offered them His hospitality. Hmm! That puts a different light on it doesn't it? Jesus' readiness to associate with sinners scandalised the religious authorities. That a rabbi would do such a thing! Our Lord did this of course to show His love for sinners and offer them repentance. He didn't confine his message to the synagogue where it could have remained all very theoretical. He practised what he preached and sat down with the outcasts and

so-called dregs of his society to offer them the Love of God. And here, he found a ready response; much more so in fact that amongst the self designated "righteous."

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32)

Jesus called his disciples to share in this part of his ministry fully and therefore it is something we as Christians should take seriously as well. We need to bear in mind one crucial difference though which should make us even more humble. Our Lord in the perfection of his God-Manhood did not lord it over these sinners with an air of superiority and crippling condescension. Far from it, He showed nothing but respect for all and solicitous concern for those who would hear his message and respond to Him.

We, on the other hand, have not yet achieved our perfection in grace. Yet, our Lord expects us to serve him in the same way. We have no grounds for boasting, therefore; still less for the ever present temptation to patronise others with any spurious moral rectitude. Ours must always be the prayer of the Publican (tax collector) who would not even raise his eyes up to heaven but was content to beseech God's mercy for himself. He knew himself on the inside and he therefore knew that he could not stand before God in his own righteousness. This self knowledge, itself wrought by grace, is the ever present state of all Christians. It's what should convince us that the only difference between ourselves and many who are in jail is that we have not yet been found out!

"For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith." (Romans 3:22b-25a)

When, therefore, we show hospitality to sinners it is one sinner humbling himself / herself in the presence of others. We do so not to be drawn into vice but to reach out to others with the same mercy that God used and uses to reach out to us.

There are two reasons, therefore, why we should keep bad company. The first is because we are heralds by word and deed of the mercy of God for all people; the second because we are part of that "bad company" as well and we should never forget it no matter how committed we are as Christians. The great St. Anthony of the Desert reminds us that we should expect temptations until our last breath. We shall never in this life cease to rely upon the mercy of God for the salvation of our souls. It is precisely this self knowledge and reliance that will give others the courage to come to Him who is "good and the Lover of Mankind."

Fr. Gregory

The Mind of Caesar

"For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him ..." (1 Corinthians 2:11a)."

Who can know what goes on in the minds of our leaders? Who can know, indeed, what goes on in the counsels of higher government? We can't of course. Such things are not discernible or open to public gaze. We are like astronomers peering at a black hole. We can't see what is inside the hole. We can only make certain inferences from the effects the hole has on its environment. Sometimes the black hole will make us see what it wants us to see and dazzle us with a show of bright radiation ... but we are not fooled ... the black hole really is black.

The mind of Caesar is obscure to us but we can look at the situation on the ground and pay less attention to the Emperor's rather clumsy attempts at propaganda. A classic example of such propaganda

occurred today (1 December 2002) when our UK foreign secretary Jack Straw told us what an awful regime Baghdad is. They rip out the tongues of those who dissent apparently. I'm sure they do. Will we stop soliciting Saudi support because they chop off peoples' hands for stealing? I think not. What this is all about of course is massaging public opinion to get it lined up for the forthcoming attack on Iraq.

What about the firemens' dispute? (For our international readers ... these public sector workers are engaged in strike action at the moment to improve pay and conditions. Until recently they have received a fair measure of public support). The government is currently trying to portray Andy Gilchrist (the union leader) as a political wrecker ... a Scargill reborn, challenging democratic institutions. Mr. Blair wants us to see this as his own particular Thatcherite show down with the resurgent left in British politics. Is anyone buying this? I don't know. We shall have to see.

These examples show that politicians, (increasingly nowadays), play to the gallery to cover an agenda that isn't always clear. If anyone challenges that hidden agenda then either he will be dismissed as a looney conspiracy theorist ... or even worse, as a traitor. Now is the test of our much vaunted democracy ... our freedom. Will politicians be held accountable to us, the people, or not? Will we force every ounce of honesty out of them or not? Or, (as is more likely), will we sit back in front of our wide screen TV Multimedia Entertainment Centres and watch the pretty fireworks in Iraq and let someone else bother about that. As a finer and greater politician than any around we see today once said:- "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance." (Churchill)

Anyone care to take up an observation post on the edge of the black hole? Be careful!

Fr. Gregory

God Gets Involved

An old story is told about a drunk who fell into a pit. The sides of the pit were so steep and he was so inebriated that he could not get out. He cried in alarm to anyone who would hear him.

A Jew walked by, stopped, took out the Psalms and quoted:-

"I am reckoned among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength" (Ps 88:4)

"My son," he said, observe God's Law and you will not stumble." With that he walked on by.

A Muslim walked to the edge of the pit, peered over and declaimed: "You are a drunk, an unbeliever. First submit both Allah and to his laws, then you will know Paradise." In disgust, he also walked away hurriedly.

A Hindu approached, a sage. "Your karma is now set by this deed. There is nothing you can do. Accept death and on your next rebirth perhaps your soul will make more progress." The sage calmly walked away.

A Buddhist monk approached and with compassion he looked down on the man and tried to teach him to meditate. "Try to extinguish your desires ... for earthly freedom, even for life itself. With desire comes suffering. With the right mental attitude you too can attain nibbana." The monk retreated from the pit with a beatific smile on his face.

The drunk man grumbled noisily to himself in the pangs of his pain that all men were the same. With much difficulty he slumped and forward and fell into a fitful sleep.

Suddenly he was rudely awoken by a rough fellow gently shaking him. This man had let himself down into the pit with a rope.

The descent was so difficult beset with sharp stones, briars and obstacles that his hands and body were bleeding.

He took a spare rope, tied it round the drunken man's waist who fell silent in disbelief. The drunk felt himself dragged to the side of the pit whereupon his rescuer strapped them both together and raised them up on a pulley fixed into the edge of the top of the pit for that purpose.

As they both stood out of the pit into the sunshine, unshackled, the drunken man, who was now a little more sober, looked round. The stranger had gone but there was a rather odd charge that lingered on in the air. He did not feel alone.

He looked back into the pit and thought thankfully about the great sacrifice this Man had made to save him.

POSTSCRIPT

This story makes the point of course that Christianity is unique amongst all world faiths in respect of the Incarnation of Christ.

We believe that God has got involved PERSONALLY in the affairs of this world to save mankind.

He did not merely lecture us from afar, blame us or teach us how to try and accept things as they are. He came down to earth to sort the problems out.

He left us not simply the example and teaching of His Son's life but also the way into a newness of life, through the death-defeating resurrection of Christ.

When Christ ascended to heaven, the Father sent unto us the Holy Spirit to continue this salvation work. God has never left us alone to suffer the consequences of our own stupidity and weakness, our waywardness and rebellion. Like any true and loving Father he has and still does get involved. We, as his followers, can do no less.

Fr. Gregory