

# ORTHODOX ENGLAND

*In this issue:*

A Thousand Years of ERROR

From the Righteous: A thousand  
year-old Homily of Abbot Ælfric  
of Eynsham: On the  
Exaltation of the Holy Cross

The Saints of England

Children of Light

Democracy – A Failed Experiment?

*and much more . . .*

Vol 13, Number 1  
September 2009



ORTHODOX ENGLAND VOL. 13 NO. 1

[www.orthodoxengland.org.uk](http://www.orthodoxengland.org.uk)

A Quarterly Journal of English Orthodox Reading

September 2009

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Published with the blessing of the Very Reverend Mark, Archbishop of the Diocese of Great Britain and Ireland of the Church Outside Russia.

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Publication dates: 1 September, 1 December, 1 March, 1 June.

## Editorial

# 1009–2009 – A THOUSAND YEARS OF ERROR: ON THE ‘LANGUAGE’ OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY

ON seeing the architecture, icons and liturgy of the Orthodox Church, the average English person may say: ‘It’s beautiful, but it’s foreign to me’. And yet somewhere the beauty seen may seem somehow vaguely familiar and disturbing, like unsettling, half-forgotten memories in the back of the mind.

A few may realize that all this is because Orthodoxy reminds us of the Church Christianity<sup>1</sup> which previously existed in the West. We have been distanced and alienated from that former Church Christianity by a national consciousness, as it has been deformed over a thousand years<sup>2</sup>. These deformations began in the Middle Ages, spiritually and intellectually with anti-Patristic Scholasticism, politically and militarily with the Crusades and artistically and architecturally with the Gothic style.

Later, this already deformed consciousness was further diluted and overlaid by more ‘Christianisms’, which have appeared since the Middle Ages. Modern reactions to the untruths of these ‘Christianisms’, or Christian-based ideologies, have today made people largely indifferent and even hostile to the unadulterated and undefigured Truth of Christ, the Orthodox Christian Church, which gave the Faith of England’s childhood: hence, the vaguely familiar memories and unsettling reactions.

Nevertheless, more spiritually sensitive English people are still homesick and nostalgic for that thousand-year old childhood, which causes them to invent myths and fantasies about some other kingdom, for example that of Middle Earth in Tolkien. However, people no longer possess the key to unlock the door to the world and culture of that childhood, to the understanding their own spiritual history.

True, the fragments and vestiges of that world and its culture are still here, in old customs, in the names of saints and villages and in the stonework

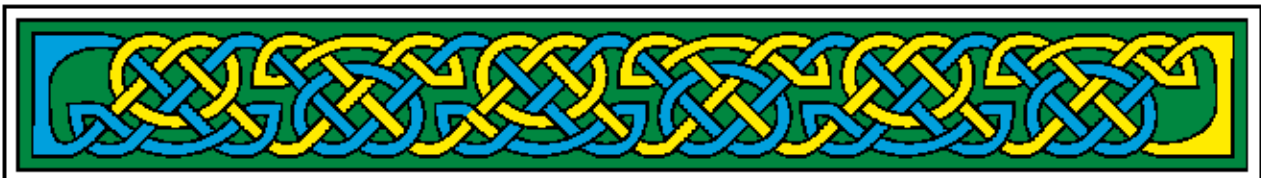
of ancient churches. But these fragments and vestiges speak a different language to that of Gothic architecture, feudal castles and all the later Establishment institutions which followed on from them. And these include the uprooted, pseudo-Gothic institutions of the nineteenth century or the soulless modern ones of the twentieth century. Built by the Conqueror and his distant spiritual descendants, all these monuments remain disaffected from Orthodoxy and, naturally, Orthodox are disaffected from them.

In other words, few today can translate the language of the Old English kingdom of lost knowledge and experience. It is a sad fact that the dictionaries required can only be found abroad. Those dictionaries confirm what we had always thought: that the real translation for the word ‘Christian’ is ‘Orthodox’ and that the translation for ‘Church’ is ‘the Orthodox Church’.

Until we have understood that, we shall not begin to rid ourselves of the centuries of cultural prejudice, ignorance and misunderstanding. And only then shall we begin to speak the language of Orthodox Christianity and understand that words like ‘theology’, ‘council’, ‘pope’, ‘bishop’, ‘priest’, ‘Easter’, ‘sacrament’, ‘prayer’, ‘fasting’, ‘feast’, ‘vestments’, ‘dogma’ all mean quite different things in Orthodox language from the meanings associated with them in Non-Orthodox language. And only then shall we begin to understand the Gospels of Christ and the living ways of His Body, the Church.

*Fr Andrew*

1. We use the word ‘Church’ in preference to the word ‘Christianity’. The former appears 110 times in the New Testament, the latter never.
2. The thousandth anniversary of the election of Pope Sergius IV on 31 July 1009 has just passed. It was he whose name was struck off the records by the Church of Constantinople a thousand years ago, perhaps on this very day. According to some, his name was struck off because he was the first Roman pope to confess the *filioque*.



## From the Righteous: A THOUSAND YEAR-OLD HOMILY OF ABBOT ÆLFRIC OF EYNHAM: ON THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

*In celebration of the forthcoming thousandth anniversary of his repose, we begin a series of translations of homilies of Abbot Ælfric of Eynham (c. 950 – c. 1010)<sup>1</sup>. These are the first ever translations of these homilies from Old English into 21st century English.*

EVER since the Holy Cross was found, we have honoured it twice a year with songs of praise for the confirmation of our faith and to the glory of our Lord. We celebrate the Finding of the Cross in honour of our Saviour, Who deigned to suffer on it, after Easter<sup>2</sup>. In harvest-time we hold holy services for the second feast. This is when the cross was brought back to Jerusalem, as we shall now relate.

The Jews hid the cross with evil intent. They did not want this treasure to become a comfort for people. But then Blessed Helena discovered it in Jerusalem through Christ, Who miraculously revealed it. She divided the Cross as the Lord had told her, leaving one portion, which she enshrined in silver, in the city where Christ had suffered, as it is written. Then she went home with the other portion of the precious tree to her dear son Constantine, in order to strengthen his faith.

Unfortunately, as still very often happens, the country was invaded by heathen. An impious king called Chosroe<sup>3</sup> took a great army to Jerusalem, where Helena had placed the Holy Cross. Impiously bold, he pillaged the country and took the Holy Cross back to his own country. He was such an exalted and wicked ruler that he wanted to be God. So he built a high stone temple which he covered with silver and then encrusted his whole palace with brilliant jewels. On the upper floor he made a throne all of red gold and very cleverly piped water, as he wanted to make it rain, as if he himself were God. Nevertheless, he was very foolish, because the rain could not be of much use to many.

Then he worked even harder to show off his power. He secretly ordered men to dig down in such a skilful way that horses constantly ran around the palace along secret trenches, making a noise with their hooves like thunder. He was foolish. Then he sat on his throne like God on high and placed the Holy Cross next to it, as it were a

companion in his impiety. He sat enthroned there from that moment on, handing over control of his whole kingdom to his son. However, Christ destroyed him.

In those days there was an Emperor called Heraclius<sup>4</sup>, who was a true Orthodox Christian. Undaunted in war, his faith was adorned by good works and he honoured the servants of God with kindness. Now Chosroe's son went to war against the Emperor, wanting to win his kingdom in battle. They decided to fight bravely in single combat on a bridge. The winner would rule the kingdom without losing the men who had accompanied them. They both agreed that if anyone helped them, he would be seized straightaway and thrown into the river, their legs broken. So they went onto the bridge together and the Orthodox Emperor killed the enemy of God, Chosroe's son.

Heraclius took over all his kingdom and rode to Chosroe. When the whole army had gladly surrendered to Heraclius, he greeted them and persuaded them to be baptized. No one would tell Chosroe about the battle because he was hated by all his people. So Heraclius went up to the steep upper floor and straightaway spoke to the impious Chosroe: 'Life I will grant you, if from now on you will believe in Jesus Christ and promise to be baptized. I will be your friend and let you have this land. But if you will not, then you will be put to death'. Chosroe would not believe in Christ, so Heraclius immediately drew his sword and beheaded him, ordering him to be buried.

Heraclius took Chosroe's younger son, a ten year-old boy, baptized him and gave him the kingdom. He gave his own army the high temple with all the silver, but took the gold and the jewels for the Church of God. Enthusiastic, he gladly took the Cross back to Jerusalem in procession. Riding quickly, they at last came to the city. The Emperor was sitting on a royal steed, as it pleased him. But as he was about to enter the city, the gate closed, the stones suddenly moved together and the gate became like a wall.

They were all terrified by this extraordinary sign and immediately looked to heaven in sorrow. There they saw our Lord's Cross shining in glory and God's angel carrying it above the gate, saying:

'When the King of Heaven Christ Himself entered this same gate to His passion, He was neither clothed in purple, nor adorned with a royal crown, nor did He ride through the stone gate on a steed, but rode meekly on the back of an ass as an example to men, so they would shun pride'. On these words the angel ascended.

And behold! The Emperor immediately got off his horse, thanking God for the lesson. He took off his purple and girdle of pall and walked barefoot, carrying the Cross, praising God and shedding tears. Then a miracle of God happened to the stonework. As the Emperor meekly approached, the stones parted and the gate opened. There was also another miracle, for as the Holy Cross was brought home, it gave off a delightful fragrance, filling all the air throughout the country. The people rejoiced at this and were filled with the fragrance. No perfume could give off such a delightful fragrance.

The Emperor exclaimed with joy: 'O marvellous Cross, on Which Christ deigned to suffer and quench our sins with His precious blood. O Cross, shining more than the stars, glorious on this middle earth! You are greatly to be loved, O holy and delightful tree, worthy to bear the prize of all the middle earth! Remember those gathered together here to honour God!' The Emperor raised up the Holy Cross in the very place where it had first stood, before the impious king Chosroe had taken it away.

On the same day the true Saviour showed His power through miracles of His illustrious Cross. A man rose from the dead, four bedridden and then ten lepers were miraculously healed from their lingering disease, many insane regained their senses and many sick were healed of various illnesses at the Holy Cross for the honour of Christ. Then the Emperor gave out a lot of presents and endowed God's churches with land and support, restoring Divine worship. Then he went to his throne in Constantinople with great faith, musing on the greatness of God.

Now, in Christian books this day is called the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, because the Cross was raised up with great honour in praise of the Lord. However, it should be known that portions of the Cross have been given out to every country near and far. But the spiritual significance is always with God, always incorruptible, even though the tree is cut into portions. The heavenly sign of the Holy Cross is our banner against the fierce devil, when we boldly bless ourselves through God with

the sign of the Cross and Orthodox belief. People can wave their hands about wonderfully, but this is not a blessing unless they make the sign of the holy Cross, when the fierce enemy is immediately terrified by the sign of victory. We must make the sign with three fingers and bless ourselves for the Holy Trinity, Who is the God Who rules in glory.

Some priests sometimes say that in the hereafter, on the great Day of Judgement, Christ's betrayer, the impious Judas, will not be condemned to the depths of hell. They say that he can ask forgiveness of Christ, as if he had been obliged to betray Him. But against this we say that Christ's word is not false. He said that it would have been better if Judas had not been born than to have been His betrayer.

Neither the Jews, nor the secret traitor, were forced by God into that horrible intention. However, when Christ, Who sees all things, saw their evil intention, He turned it to good, so that their wickedness became salvation for us. Everyone who does evil with an evil intention is guilty before God, even though some may benefit from it. Everyone who does good with a good intention is rewarded by God, even though some may be harmed by it. This is because the Righteous Judge rewards everyone, as He Himself decides and as His will dictates to Him. For example, the Jews and the shameless traitor Judas, who plotted against Him, are guilty of Christ's death, even though this became everlasting redemption for us. None of them will ever enter Christ's kingdom – unless they repent and turn to Christ.

The Saviour is so merciful that He would have mercy on His own murderers, if they turned and prayed for His mercy, as many of them have done. For instance, there is the centurion who wickedly pierced His holy side and afterwards turned to Him. He was called Longinus<sup>5</sup>. He saw how suddenly the sun went dark from midday until three o'clock, how the whole middle earth trembled and the rocks burst asunder. Then he turned to Christ, beating his chest and saying in a loud voice: 'Truly this is the Son of God'. He gave up his position, went to the apostles, was instructed by them in the faith and was washed from his former deeds through baptism.

Next he gave away all his goods in alms and lived in purity and great abstinence like Christ's own servant. He preached the true faith and forgiveness of sins to the heathen, putting down idolatry and performing miracles in God's name, until a certain cruel judge put him to death with



great torments. But amid the torments he worked many miracles in front of the judge, blinding him by the power of God, so that people should know how merciful the Saviour Who had so magnified him, is. Then he was beheaded for the sake of the Saviour, Whom before he had cruelly wounded on the Cross. Now he dwells eternally in glory with Him

The heathen judge who put him to death was called Octavius. Later he went to where Longinus had been killed, looking for his body. Praying for forgiveness with weeping and lamentation, he regained his sight straightaway, enlightened by him who before had made him blind. The judge buried

Longinus' body with great splendour. He believed in Christ and always glorified God until he departed this life. Glory and praise be to the God, Who loves mankind and reigns eternally. Amen.

- 1 For further details of his life see *Orthodox England* Vol 8, No 3. For other translations of Abbot Ælfric's writings see Vol 2, No 1 and Vol 3, No 1.
- 2 This refers to the then feast of the Finding of the Cross on 3 May. Now the first feast to celebrate the Cross falls before Easter, on the third Sunday in Lent. This is the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross, which usually falls in March.
- 3 From the Persian Empire.
- 4 The Emperor Heraclius reigned from 610 to 641.
- 5 St Longinus (16 October).

## THE SAINTS OF ENGLAND

### 11. The Enlighteners

**W**HILE the new faith was building up civilisation inside England, it was also at work turning new converts into missionaries. England was barely Christian when it became a Christianising centre, a base of operations to send out the light of Christ to neighbouring peoples. The pupils grew up into teachers in a night, so to say.

A great number of the early English clergy heard the call to evangelize those distant and forbidding territories which were the original home of the race. It was largely owing to this that the Scandinavian and German peoples, still plunged in the darkness of heathenism, were brought into the Christian fold. Monks and nuns quit their native land, endured endless fatigues and trials and, in some cases laid down their lives in striving to plant the standard of the Cross on the Continent.

In the place of honour stands Winfrith, whose name means Friend of Peace, and whose Latin name Boniface, means Benefactor. The early English did not often take on older Christian names; had they done so, the names of their saints would have been very different. In all probability Winfrith was perhaps content to leave his name alone, but he had it changed for him. 'St Benefactor' is certainly revealing enough. Some uncertainty surrounds his origin, although Crediton in Devon is probably his birthplace. Crediton may mean town on the Creedy. From the Creedy St Boniface carried the spirit of truth, the flame of love and of martyrdom into the depths of

forests which the Roman legions themselves had never been able to penetrate.

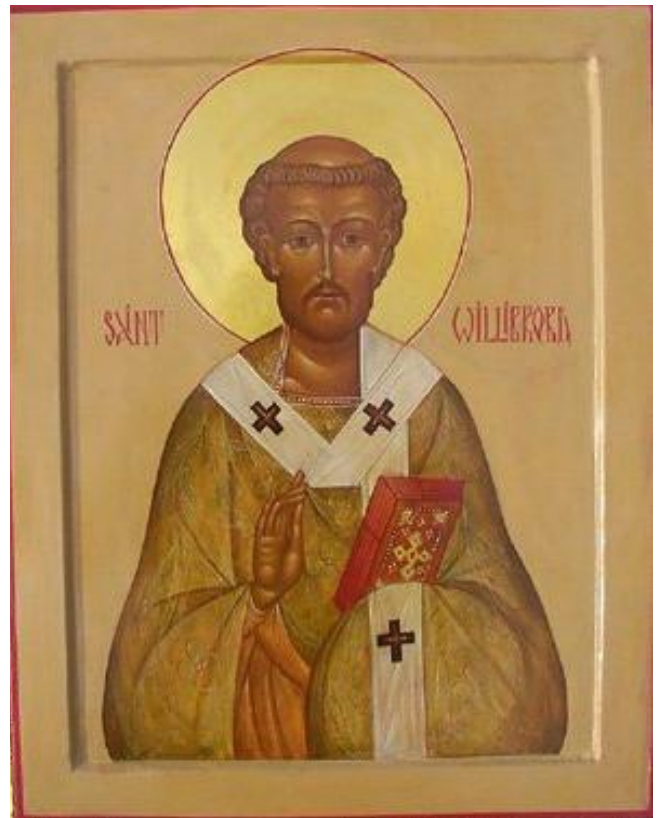
Boniface was not the pioneer of these missions to the heathen of the North. Enterprising priests, both Celtic and English, had been there before him. Among the latter is St Wilfrid, who is venerated as one of the Apostles of Holland. Then there is St Wilfrid's fellow Northumbrian and pupil St Willibrord (Clement), who converted the Frisians, was the first Bishop of Utrecht and gained for the town of Echternach European fame. Here, in Luxembourg, annually takes place the procession of the holy dancers. Thus, in the year 1906, when St Willibrord's remains were moved from one church to another, over fifteen thousand people danced in his honour, accompanied by some three thousand singers and four hundred musicians. Today the custom continues and it has become a great tourist event



*Echternach in the throes of the dancing procession – photo by Marc Theis*

The origin of this unusual form of devotion is obscure, although the practice itself is ancient. With regard to St Willibrord's dance the legend is that when, in the fourteenth century, a pestilence raged among the cattle around Echternach, the symptoms of which were a kind of nervous shaking, the people thought that by imitating these movements while praying at the same time, they might move the saint to check the spread of the disease. The desired result was obtained and so the procession became an annual affair. Nowadays it is performed especially on behalf of those afflicted by epilepsy and other such illnesses. The dance begins at 9 a.m. and continues right into the afternoon. The performers go four or five abreast and link hands, take three steps forward and then two back and so on. On arrival at the church the dance is continued round the tomb of the saint. The accompaniment is a melody hundreds of years old composed for the purpose.

One of St Willibrord's fellow-labourers was the Englishman St Werenfrid, who evangelized Batavia where he is still remembered. Another was St Swithbert, an English monk who built a monastery on an island in the Rhine six miles below Dusseldorf. The two brothers, Ewald the Dark and Ewald the Fair, are the patron saints of



*St Willibrord*

Westphalia. They went to Germany in 694, long before St Boniface, but were martyred almost on arrival. Their bodies were thrown into the Rhine but were recovered and interred in Cologne, where they remain.

Like St Bede and most Orthodox priests, Boniface was ordained at the age of thirty. He was brought up in the monasteries of Exeter and Winchester. In the year 716 he set out for Friesland. After his consecration as bishop, he fixed his see in Mainz and for twenty-two years travelled and worked so successfully that he is still venerated as the Apostle of Germany. He suffered death at the hands of the pagans of Friesland in 754. His remains rest in the abbey of Fulda, the meeting-place of the German bishops. It was he who cut down the sacred oak, and thus, by exploding the legend of Thor's implacable vengeance, opened the sluices of the baptismal water.

The conversion of Germany dates from this felling, just as England's may be said to date from the conference held under the oak in the forest of Kent. This daring and memorable deed explains how an axe and an oak come to figure amongst the saint's emblems. But he has other emblems besides – a book, a scourge, a fox, a fountain, a raven and a sword. Having brought the tree crashing to the ground St Boniface, as a practical Englishman, cut



*St Boniface (Wynfrith) of Crediton*

*The martyrdom of St Boniface: based on an eleventh-century Fulda Sacrament book*



it up and, built a chapel out of its wood. He is the patron saint of woodsmen, brewers, tailors and file cutters. Fifty-two of his companions suffered with him. Beside his body they found a blood-stained copy of St Ambrose's book on *The Advantages of Death* which he had been reading.

This justly celebrated man was one of those fearless souls who, by sheer force of personality, attract to their side enthusiastic followers. They were mostly English. Women responded to his appeal as readily as men. The first to go were St Lioba and St Thecla, but many more followed. As one historian says 'Silence and humility may have veiled the labours of these nuns from the eyes of the world at large, but history has assigned them their place at the very beginning of Germany's civilisation'. St Richard, who was a noble of Wessex, sacrificed three of his children in this way. He had married a relation of St Boniface and became the father of three saints – Sts Willibald, Winebald and Walburgh, all of whom left their native land in order to help the good cause.

Willibald was born near Southampton. When he was a child of three, his life being despaired of, his parents carried him to the market cross and laid him at its foot, promising him to God should he recover. He did and was handed over to a monastery. While still a youth, he accompanied his father on a pilgrimage to Rome and the Holy Land. The father died on the way, but Willibald reached his destination and was imprisoned by Muslims. On his release he visited Palestine and Egypt. The trip took him seven years. Then he settled for a time at Monte Cassino, founded by St Benedict, 'the Patriarch of Western monks', who had been inspired by St Basil the Great. After this he made

for what is now Germany. He chose Eichstätt as his see and governed it for forty-five years. His brother, Winebald made his way to Rome, studied there and then settled for good in Thuringia where he built a monastery at the request of St Boniface. More than once the pagans poisoned his food; but he was not to be killed that way. He reposed in his sleep.

Walburgh was a nun at Wimborne for twenty-six years before she crossed the North Sea. Her name has the same meaning as the Greek Eucheria. Gracious she was indeed, so much so that she came to be venerated all over the Continent under various names, Gauburge, Vaugourg, Felbourg, Warpurg. She is, in fact, the patron of Oudenarde, Fumes, Antwerp, Gronigen, Weilburg and Zutphen. St Walburgh was abbess of a double monastery near the Bavarian frontier and reposed, like St Bede, saying, 'Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit'.

She is one of the myrrh-giving saints who have figured in the Church since the first centuries. One of the earliest of these is St Glyceria, the martyr from whose relics flowed myrrh. After twelve hundred years, the fluid still flows from her relics at Eichstätt. A chemical analysis shows that the fluid contains nothing but the ingredients of water. It is known all over the world. The writer, while preparing this, came across many cases in which the oil is used with great faith and confidence and has some himself. The first mention of the phenomenon is made in the ninth century by an early biographer of the holy abbess. She is still called on by sailors in peril on the sea. She is depicted in iconography with a crown at her feet and a little bottle in her hand.



St Lioba will appear again in another chapter. She crossed the North Sea and took charge of a monastery just founded at Bischoffsheim, and by her engaging manners and fascinating personality won the respect of princes and people alike. Boniface and she corresponded for years and the two are buried at Fulda. St Thecla left her peaceful convent at Wimborne to become abbess of a community near Wurzburg. The patron saint of Deventer is another Englishman, Liefwine by name, who ranged himself alongside the great apostle, as did St Willehad, the first Bishop of Bremen and the first Christian missionary to cross the Elbe.

In setting out, these courageous men and women literally took their lives into their hands. Their enterprise brought them amongst a population which was friendly and hostile by turns. They never knew, from day to day, how their mood might change. The rulers had to be placated if anything was to be done at all, but they were as fickle as their subjects. Wilfrid, for instance, spent a year among the Frisians and did very well owing to the goodwill of the king. 'Then, suddenly, a certain Ebroin, mayor of the palace, took a violent dislike to him, tried to kidnap him out of hand and, when that miscarried, offered his sovereign a bushel of gold coins if he would deliver the saint up. Wilfrid, however, made his escape.

Their courage is all the more striking in view of the terror of the sea and the neglect of sea travel which more or less prevailed at this period. True, perhaps, the English have sea-going qualities in their blood. True again, in the fourth century, the pagan English were pretty well the acknowledged masters of the northern waters. Contemporary writers such as Sidonius, testify to their love of its perils and their familiarity with its moods and dangers. Storms which inspired fear in others gave them a fierce joy. When hard pressed by an enemy, they found a protector in the very storm which terrified their opponents, the veil and cover behind which they were able to plan a fresh attack.

This passion it was that earned for them the nickname of sea-kings, and doubtless it is from them that many English people today derive their seagoing tendencies. These sea-kings so constantly harassed the east coast of Britain that it came to be known as the Saxon Shore. The meanest of their seamen was capable of handling an oar, raising a sail and steering a vessel. It was their command of the seas that enabled them to gain possession of Britain, a lesson which England has never



*St Walburga (Walburh)*

forgotten. How comes it, then, that their first literature talks about the sea as though they were almost strangers to it?

The fact is that, after their settlement in Britain, they completely neglected sea-going affairs. It was not until the reign of King Alfred, towards the end of the ninth century, that they appeared to have thought of building a ship of war, and it may be doubted if before that time they had even had a trading vessel of their own. Hence the ease with which the Danes were able to pounce on them. It was no easy matter, either, reviving the old enthusiasm, since the sea-going trade was looked upon as wanting in that nobility so coveted by the English. The law had to step in, in an effort to mend matters. Under King Athelstan in the tenth century, it was enacted that any merchant who had made three voyages with his own ship and cargo be admitted to the rank of thane. For the first time in history, commerce was legally ennobled and saved from scorn.

These sainted voyagers, then, had little option, save to trust themselves to foreign vessels and foreign crews. The latter were still pagans and,

therefore, rather unsympathetic. The hazards, too, were real enough. St Peter, the first Abbot of Augustine's monastery at Canterbury, was drowned just as the vessel that carried him had reached the harbour of Ambleteuse near Boulogne in northern France. His relics are still guarded and venerated there to this day. The boat on which St Walburgh embarked would surely have foundered had it not been for the power of her prayers. On one of his many return journeys, Wilfrid's ship, making for Sandwich, was carried off course and nearly lost on the Sussex coast.

The sea-route of those bound for Gaul and Rome would be from one of the southern ports, but the missionaries bent upon evangelising Germany had to make, in frail craft, the uncertain passage across the North Sea, where the wind and current often combined to drive the seamen far off course. The mouth of the Seine was a point much favoured, especially by the Irish; but this was no pleasure-cruise and several disasters occurred in sight of land.

## 12. Epistles to and from the English

Letters come into this portrait because its contributors are mostly recognised saints. The letters are in Latin. In one way this is regrettable. If they had used their native tongue instead of being distracted by Latin, we may be certain that the feelings flowing through their pens would have been even more touching and tender. Yet, even as it is, these pages are like so many windows through which the reader is able to have a very good view of the landscape of their souls.

As a rule, the world has no clue to the character and temperament of women who live in convents. They are just nuns and that is about all there is to it. Their epistles reveal to us the strength, the impetuous faith and independence of these daughters of a race only just and not fully converted. These women were only a few generations removed from the restless sea-rovers who had scorned to owe allegiance to any mortal man, whose untamed wills had imposed themselves upon the wills of Britons and Romans. Hence the complaints, the chafing against restriction and monotony, the longings to be able to travel, the cries of distress even which are revealed in the ages over which they poured out their hearts to their fellow-countrymen and relations abroad.

In their style, flavour and feelings the letters are quite human. Everything was natural in England in the days of St Lioba. They are letters of women culture. Literary studies, at that time, were pursued with much ardour in the female communities as in the communities of men. Nearly all the nuns knew Latin; some knew Greek. Cædmon and his story show what an extent the reading of the Scriptures was fostered in the average convent. And, for the most part, they were written from Wimborne in Dorset, Minster in Thanet, Hartlepool in Durham; and they were addressed to Boniface who was somewhere in the German lands, homesick and overwhelmed with cares and anxieties. As a rule, the letters were accompanied by parcels, containing books, vestments, linen, spices and sweetmeats. Here is such a one:

'Loving brother, in these pages I come to confide to you that I am overwhelmed by an accumulation of troubles and the tumult of secular affairs. Added to domestic anxieties, there are the quarrels which the enemy of all good takes pleasure sowing among people in general, and especially among those dwelling in convents. Above all, I am tormented by poverty, by the smallness of our cultivated land; and even more by taxes levied on us by the king and the bishop through their servants. Of all my friends and relations, not one remains. I have neither son, brother, father nor uncle. God has taken all from me by different means. Some lie in their dark graves awaiting the morning of the resurrection. Others have left their native shores and have gone abroad. For all reasons, which could not be fully explained in a day – not even in one of the long days of July or August – my life is a burden to me. Now, every being that is unhappy and has lost confidence in self, seeks a faithful friend to whom the heart can be open. How true is what they say that nothing can be sweeter than to have someone to whom we can speak as to ourselves. Such a friend I have sought and such a friend I have found in you. Oh, that God would deign to carry me in the arms of His angel as He did the Prophet Habakkuk and the deacon Philip, and so bring me to the far country in which you travel'.

St Liobgytha had received the surname of Lioba (love) because of the affection with which she was regarded by all. This is how she introduces herself:

'To the very reverend lord and bishop, Boniface, beloved in Christ, his kinswoman Liobgytha, the last of God's servants, health and eternal salvation. I pray, you can bring to mind the friendship which

united you to my father Tinne, an inhabitant of Wessex, who died eight years ago. I also remind you of Ebba, your kinswoman, who has for long been subject to great infirmities. 'Well, I am their only daughter; and God grant, unworthy as I am, that I might have the honour of having you for my brother, for none of all my kindred inspires in me the confidence that you do. I have taken care to send you a little present, so that, despite the distance that divides our dwellings the tie of true love may unite us for the rest of our days. You will find below some poetry that I have attempted to compose, not out of vainglory, but to exercise the brain that God has given me. Farewell! Live a long and happy life and intercede for me'.

In a short letter to Boniface, Abbess Bugga, who was the daughter of a King of Wessex, assures him that no revolution of time and human vicissitudes will ever be able to change the state of her mind towards him. Boniface, it seems, had asked her to obtain for him a copy of a book dealing with the sufferings and deaths of the martyrs, and she promises to send it along as soon as she can. In return she asks him to let her have the Extracts from Holy Scripture, 'which you promised me in your sweet letter'. Then she asks him to pray for one of her departed relations and encloses money and an altar cloth.

'Since death', writes another, 'has snatched from me my brother Oshere whom I loved more than anybody in this world, I prefer you to all other men. The longer I live the more I suffer. I have found out that the love of man brings sorrow, but the love of Christ lightens the heart. Lately, a new sorrow has befallen me; my sister Withburgh has suddenly disappeared from my side – she with whom I grew up, with whom I shared the same cradle'. Withburgh had not died, we learn, but was shut up in some prison in Rome, for reasons which are not stated. And then she continues: 'I cry to you from the end of the earth; calm the waves of my trouble, support my weakness, send me help either in the form of some relics or, at least, in the form of a few words from your hand'.

Another, who describes herself as the very least of God's handmaids, reproaches him for his silence and concludes: 'I feel that you have ceased to care for your poor little sister'.

One whose name is unknown appeals to her only brother who was one of the companions of Boniface: 'I have received with tender gratitude your message and gifts. What you tell me I will do, but on condition that you come back and see me.

I declare that even if you stayed with me one day and left then the sorrow would vanish from my heart. But perhaps you would like me to come to you. Very well, I would willingly go where the bodies of our parents rest to end my life there. Dear servant of the Cross, beloved of your sister, keep your fame for ever, but come to me or let me go to you that I may see you before die. I pray for you every hour, every, minute. I pray, weeping and stretched out on the earth, that you may live happily here and that you may become a saint'.

We shall note how the English love of making pilgrimages invaded the peaceful convents of the nuns, and how Boniface, jealous of the good of his country, appealed to the civil authority to prohibit pious but dangerous journeys altogether. In spite of this opposition, he was pestered by requests from his spiritual daughters in England. Some of them, doubtless, chafed a bit against the monotony their life; and those who did not thought it very hard that, having looked forward for years and made all arrangements, the journey should be cancelled. Boniface had sometimes to be a hard man in order to turn a deaf ear to the petitions addressed to him. Here is one of them from the pen of Eangytha:

'We use our confidence in you, brother Boniface, to tell you that for a long time now we have desired, like so many of our kinsmen and friends, to visit that Rome which was once mistress of the world, in order to obtain forgiveness of our sins. I, above all, Eangytha, who am old and consequently have more sins than others, I have this desire. Some time ago I broached the subject to Wala, our abbess and spiritual mother, as well as my daughter, who was then very young. Of course, I know that there are many who disapprove. They point to the canons which enjoin that each should remain where she has made her vows and give an account of those vows to God. Troubled by this doubt, we pray you, my daughter and I, to be our Aaron and to present our petition to the Almighty, that He may show us what will be most useful to our souls, to remain at home or to go on this pilgrimage. Meanwhile, send an answer to this letter which I have written in a style so rustic and unpolished. You are our friend, and a friend is long sought, rarely found, and still more rarely preserved. Farewell! Pray that our sins may not bring misfortune to us'.

Boniface, in his turn, pours his troubles into those willing ears. He entreats St Edburgh, whom he elegantly styles 'beloved lady, blessed virgin and accomplished mistress of the monastic rule', to

pray for him because he has much to suffer at the hands, not only of the heathen, 'but also of nominal Christians, unworthy priests and ill-living clerics'. 'Do not be annoyed at me for always asking for the same thing. Each day brings me trouble and, therefore, each day I must seek consolation of my brethren and sisters'.

'To my beloved sister, the Abbess Edburgh, long interwoven with my soul by the ties of spiritual relationship, Boniface, envoy of the Roman Church, servant of the servants of God. The saddest of all my trials is the snare laid by false brethren is worse than the malice of unbelievers. Pray then to

the Lamb of God to protect me from these wolves. Pray, pray always that my mouth may be made eloquent to make the Gospel shine like a flame among the pagan nations.

'To the sister whom I love in the love of Christ more than all other women. I am deeply grieved to learn that since you resigned the government of your monasteries your situation has grown worse instead of better. Recollect, however, that God Who, in the springtime of your youth, called you to himself, now, when you are old, may increase the beauty of your soul by means of these trials and contradictions'.

## CHILDREN OF LIGHT

### 5. Freedom

HERE is in English a proverb which says that, 'Love can neither be bought nor sold'. There is also a Russian proverb which says that, 'You cannot make yourself loved through violence'. Both witness to the same Truth – that Love is free, that by its very nature, Love cannot be forced to develop. Love is the spontaneous joy, the joy which flies, as in William Blake's poetry.

And yet if Freedom is so important to the most important of Christian values, Love, what exactly do we mean by the term Freedom – do we really understand the word?

There are two types of freedom, physical and spiritual, external and internal. Let us first consider the least important – from a religious point of view – physical freedom.

Physical freedom is either suppressed or affirmed by the State in modern society. In the Twentieth Century, with its totalitarian Fascist and Communist regimes, we are particularly aware of the problem of preserving freedom. Physical freedom is defined as the freedom to do this or that, to do as we wish, as long as no-one is offended in so doing. It is the freedom not to have to show papers to the police, freedom to belong to any organisation, to live in a certain way and not in another, freedom to go somewhere whenever we want. Without such freedom we feel that we cannot breathe. Nowadays we are more concerned with this physical freedom than with anything else. This is the freedom of movement, of ideas, of privacy. As the State has grown stronger, so physical freedom has grown weaker. We only need to take a very brief look at the history of the world

over the last century to confirm this. But why is this so?

Gradually the State, the realm of Cæsar, has become more and more centralized, the law books have grown bulkier, the State has begun to interfere on a larger scale in our personal activities. Yet if we wish to reject or opt out of this scheme of things, if, for example, we do not wish to pay some of our income-tax, because it is not in fact spent on 'Defence', we find that the State is all-powerful and in such circumstances we also find that the State is run by ordinary people, receiving their instructions from some mysterious Above. The State has worked itself so much into our lives that whatever we do, factory-worker, nurse, miner, teacher, office-employee – we are all serving the State. It follows therefore that whatever the State does, we are responsible, for have we not chosen to serve the State?

If we pay our taxes towards 'Defence', then we are indirectly responsible for the deaths that may occur. If we buy a shirt, nowadays containing plastic-derived substances like polyester, then we too are responsible for the processes of pollution that went into its production. We are responsible for the same thing if we drive a car, responsible for the poisoning of human lungs through lead and carbon monoxide fumes, for the use of the petrol and the pollution from oil refineries and giant tankers and their oil slicks, for the pollution involved in the making of the steel in the car chassis, the 'Defence' policies of Western nations in countries where there are large oil fields, in Biafra, in Vietnam. It is a Kafkaesque world. The ordering and quality of our lives are controlled from above. Sins are pressed on us by our servile acceptance of the State.



In Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, the humble monk Father Zosima, says this of guilt:

'There is only one means of salvation, take yourself and make yourself responsible for everything and for all men, and you will see at once that it is really so, and that you are to blame for everyone and for all things' (p. 333 in Garnett's translation).

With his customary insight, Dostoyevsky wrote correctly. There is much guilt weighing on the shoulders of every individual. However, we must not hide behind the consciences of others, but must ourselves stand up and admit our own guilt and at least attempt to cast it off. We strive to sin less, however difficult that may be.

Guilt – universal guilt – is then the consequence of physical freedom, due to the development of the modern State, which we are ourselves, wittingly and unwittingly, have fostered. The State is the historical force of the present. By the term 'historical force', I mean the force which rules over humanity; the cosmic battle between Good and Evil, which, although veiled, appears in history and society. This force represents the externalization of the battle between God and the devil in men's hearts. As Christians, it is surely our duty to escape the burden of the guilt inherent in the Evil of this historical force. As we live at present, we are not free; we are bound to the State in order to survive – despite the fact that the State was created by each one of us. We have enslaved ourselves.

The State, or the historical force of the present inside it, is on the whole profoundly anti-Christian. For example, England, despite possessing roots in Christianity, could at present be called a pagan country. I doubt if more than 5% of its inhabitants are really Christians. For Christians the present time is also an enemy. The theatres, the cinemas, the politics, the economics, the social conventions are as a whole deeply opposed to Christian values. Therefore, every Christian who encourages them to exist is guilty.

What is to be done? Do we accept pornography in all these institutions or all the films and books that say that Western man is a totally amoral personality, a creature of violence, and that violence is stronger than Love? Do we go on accepting social conventions like smoking, the poisoning of our God-given bodies – a form of suicide? Do we accept as Christians those politicians and economists who promise more wealth, therefore more crime, more pollution,

inner and outer, more desecration of the natural world, of God's garden, by fostering further 'growth', more pollution of the human mind?

*Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the meat, and body than raiment? (Matt. 6, 25).*

Do we as Christians follow fashions? Do we as Christians vote for those politicians who by industrial growth promise a better tomorrow, a paradise on earth? – which we as Christians know to be impossible?

*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also? (Matt. 6, 21).*

Many hearts are in modern technology, not in paradise.

If then we are Christians, it is difficult for us to accept this State, we want little or no part of this universal responsibility for the evil actions of the State. As Christians we try to fight for freedom, freedom from the State, from evil historical forces in the State. Jesus Christ said:

*Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's (Matt. 22, 21).*

Our lives are God's. God's world is God's. Only the artificial things in this world, those made by Cæsar's spirit (such as money, with Cæsar's head stamped on it) belong to Cæsar. In our work we should constantly ask ourselves one question: Is this to the greater glory of God? Are we rendering unto Cæsar what is God's? For if it is unto Cæsar that we are rendering what is God's, we should no longer hide, playing the hypocrite, we should stand and face the Truth. We are responsible for our own actions before God, not only before man, for it is God alone Who will judge us in eternity.

Christians should avoid the evils of the State, the realm of Cæsar, historical and anti-Christian forces of the present, which secularize the Church. To make the Church worldly is nothing less than to attempt to destroy the Church.

*If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (Jn. 15, 19).*

My point is that many Christians forced to work in the world are not free. If they love God and love their neighbour, surely they must try and resist

spending eight hours a day doing or making evil for this society. How can a Christian make armaments or televisions which show programmes which are blasphemous? How can a Christian pollute the world and himself? Are Christians of this world or not? Christ told us that we are not. What can be simpler?

For Christians to gain the freedom to nourish Love, they have to reject the values of artificiality, of the lack of spontaneity of industrial society, the State and its armies and anti-Christian deeds. Christians surely strive to reject paganism and Mammon. If they do not, then they too will become enslaved, they too will lose their physical freedom and therefore, ultimately as a result, their spiritual freedom also.

There comes a point where physical and the more important spiritual freedom grow together. As a definition, spiritual freedom is the freedom which liberates us from the inability to love. It frees us from sin, hatred, violence, drugs, spiritually meaningless social conventions, envy, vanity, pride, egoism, greed, lust and all the enslaving powers of the devil. If we are spiritually free, we do not take offence at what people say to us, for we have already conquered the vanity which causes us to take offence. In return we love for whatever supposedly unkind remarks are aimed at us. Spiritual freedom is gained by Love, by overcoming sin within us.

Physical repression or the lack of physical freedom can weigh heavily on our power to love. If we have many enemies – our enemies being those who support and maintain that lack of freedom – but at the same time enemies through our own human weaknesses, we have insufficient Love (to love our own enemies), i.e. insufficient spiritual freedom, then not all our enemies will be loved. If, on the other hand, there is much physical freedom, if we do not feel repressed, then our Love, our spiritual freedom will develop better.

Also, if we do not have the physical freedom to choose between one thing and another, between, say, Good and Evil, then often we may choose wrongly. If we are forced to be good, we tend to reject it, because it is forced on us, and therefore, in a sense, it cannot be good. We must learn in freedom; for we wish to experience things for ourselves, then make our own judgements, to make our own choices.

In Dostoyevsky's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, the Roman Catholic in charge of the

*auto-da-fe* rejects Christ and His teachings. For Christ's message of freedom challenges the despotic tyranny displayed in the Inquisition. The Roman Catholics of the Inquisition destroyed people physically because they refused to believe in the Roman dogmas. Instead of winning people over by Christian witness, by Love, by the possession of spiritual freedom, those Roman Catholics preferred not even to allow the existence of physical freedom, the freedom to choose outwardly.

Therefore the Inquisitors killed, thus denying the Spirit of Christianity altogether. They had become the new Neros. They did not allow people to accept or reject Christianity, as they willed. In reality, however, Christianity is Freedom, because if Christianity is not voluntary, but forced, then there can be no spiritual freedom, there can be no Love. For Love can neither be bought nor sold. It cannot be forced. It is spontaneous. The repression of outward freedom can destroy Love and therefore the growth of spiritual freedom.

Note that although I do not say that spiritual freedom can be totally destroyed by repression, by the lack of outward freedom, often those who assert their Christian beliefs, their spiritual freedom, are martyred for their cause. We are witnessing this daily as thousands of new martyrs are being made in Eastern Europe. Moreover, if Communists destroy the freedom of people to read God's Word by burning all the Bibles and then proceed to close down the remaining few thousand Churches which are still allowed to remain open in Russia, then it follows that to a large extent spiritual freedom is destroyed, for no longer will people know of the possibilities of Christian Love. Here there is a theoretical example of how physical freedom could be more important than spiritual freedom.

Paradoxically the main problem of Love, of spiritual freedom, is that Christianity appears to limit our outward freedom.

*Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto Life. (Matt 7, 13-14)*

Of course, if we accept Christianity our outer actions are limited – witness the Ten Commandments – one of the foundation-stones of Christian morality. Many find this wrong; they say

that Christianity represses and is not a religion of freedom, as I have called it.

While acknowledging the fact that Christianity does limit, I also acknowledge that it is actually the workings of Evil that are limited by it. We find in Christianity an immense breadth. This breadth is found in the Love, in the spiritual freedom, in the freedom from our own sins and those of others, which Christianity brings with it. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way, but in our spiritual freedom we find after all not only breadth, also length and depth – and still more than this – we find Immortality in Eternal Life. Therefore, far from being a religion of repression, Christianity commands all four dimensions, Christianity is all-conquering. When we have tried to conquer sin and even partially succeeded, as is possible in this Life, we enter into the four-dimensional realm which is Eternal Life.

Christianity is then a religion of freedom. But why then have Christians, at various times forced Christianity onto non-Christians? Why have they sometimes fallen into the heresy of non-freedom? God forces nothing on Man – He leaves us free to accept Him or reject Him. Just as Christ sets us the example of Perfect Love, so God sets us the example of Perfect Freedom. The reason why certain so-called Christians have sometimes tried to force Christianity onto others is because they themselves have at times become thisworldly, thinking that they might be able to achieve something, by physical force. There is no such thing as a religious war, for example. In reality in this world we are not by any means forced into accepting God. Many will say on reading this that God does not give freedom in actual fact, because if we do not accept Him there will come the punishment of Hell after this life. This raises the question of Hell.

If a militant atheist dies without repentance then he risks Hell. The Gospels say as much. Although we are able to pray for the souls of the departed, and we can hope that even the worst sins will be forgiven, we only have our hopes and our Faith. And yet do we really have any idea as to what Hell actually is?

Hell could in fact be freedom in a physical sense, but because Hell is a spiritual world, then Hell is Unfreedom. Let me explain. Hell is not the mediaeval myth, the portrayal of burning flesh and sulphurous cauldrons. That also is plain. Hell is simply the torture of a human soul without God, in a much more immediate and imminent sense than

in this world – for God is all around that human soul.

This human soul, having gained no knowledge of God when on earth, i.e. never having believed in Him, having gained no Christian Love, no spiritual freedom, is lost in the world of Perfect Freedom. That is its torture, the torture of not knowing God in the presence of God. Thus, even Hell in its own way could be Freedom, physical freedom; but the potential physical freedom of Hell is totally annihilated because physical freedom cannot exist in a spiritual world. Hell, because it defines a world ignorant of God, is therefore Unfreedom: Heaven become Hell through unbelief.

Spiritual freedom is a torture for a soul which possesses a knowledge of physical freedom alone, a physical freedom which has not led that soul into the realm of spiritual freedom. Physical, outward freedom is after all an evil if it does not accept God, even though, paradoxically, God gave us in His infinite Love for us the freedom to choose. A soul is born into this world in order to experience physical freedom and then, freely and voluntarily to choose whether to love God or not. Hell is quite simply not knowing God in Heaven – in a world which is God.

With God in our hearts Freedom is a Joy; but until we have attained Faith, i.e. the knowledge of God in our hearts, Freedom weighs on us, it is a burden. Life is the attainment of Freedom, of spiritual freedom in order to become closer to God, our whole life is devoted to the redeeming of sin through suffering, thus attaining Perfect Love and Perfect Freedom. It is in this way, by living in Love and In Freedom, that we aspire to the Truth. Just as living without God and therefore not obeying His commandments in our daily work is not Freedom, so anything less than God's Truth is not the Truth.

## 6. Truth

*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 14, 6)*

In God we must live and move, observing His commandments about poverty and other-worldliness, as Christ expressed them (Matt. 6.). This is the way which leads us to Eternal Life. Christ preached God's commandments in the New Testament in the words of the Truth. To understand and attain the Truth is really so simple – we only need read the New Testament and, as we read, we

meditate deeply on it. *And ye shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free* (Jn. 8, 32)

Living in Love and learning about spiritual freedom, we reach out to a more and more profound understanding of the Truth – for we are constantly growing nearer to God. Equally, as we gain a deeper understanding of the Truth, so we learn to be free, to love, to grow closer to God. *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word in truth* (Jn. 17, 17)

The Truth is indeed God's Word. We call the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Truth. Truth is mighty. In his Nobel Prize Speech Solzhenitsyn affirms that one word of Truth can stand out and win against the Lie.

Sometimes, however we have difficulty in recognising the Truth. Sometimes this is because we refuse to recognise the Truth – for it may tell us unpleasant things about ourselves. *And because I tell you the Truth, ye believe me not* (Jn 8, 45).

I think it is because in the Truth we expect to see something, very complex and obscure that we often fail to recognise the Truth which is apparent before us. Truth is in the Scriptures. To attain an understanding of the Truth at we see it around us, we ought all to see it through the Scriptures. There are no lies there – God would never allow it. The

Scriptures were after all written by the Spirit of Truth, so that a lie here is an impossibility. It is because the Truth is so pure, clear and simple that men, with all our human weaknesses and artifices, have never agreed about the interpretation of the Gospels.

We must learn to become children before we can really understand the Truth of the Scriptures. Truth is simple, clear, light, child-like, shining, moving and profound. It is only through lack of Love and Faith that we misapprehend the Truth.

Truth is good and Truth is spiritually beautiful. Seek It around you in your everyday lives. Truth is real and living. Truth is everywhere, Truth is imminent and vital. We, as Christians, must attempt to live in Truth, for Truth, if only we could see more clearly, is all around us, Truth is inherently within real life. That is the most important fact of all. It is through observing the Truth around us that we may help one another to come together to live as one, as our Saviour in our Father and our Father in our Saviour: *Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very work's sake* (Jn. 14, 11). *That they may all be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee: that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me* (Jn. 17, 21).

## DEMOCRACY – A FAILED EXPERIMENT?

by Eadmund

'You have no rights, only privileges won for you by your ancestors.'

*The late James I. A. Frazer, historian, teacher, author and wise man*

**D**EMOCRACY is something that most of us were taught to be proud of, and something that we have always accepted. It is only recently that I have begun to question it. I am coming to the conclusion that it is rather an experiment that has failed.

I was taught at school that the ancient Greeks invented democracy. In fact, it was only introduced very partially in Athens, just one of many city-states that existed on the mainland in ancient Greece. It only worked at all because its franchise was very small – only free, male citizens of Athens were able to vote: that is, their wives, slaves and freed slaves were not – and even then the rate of its

decision-making was often painfully slow. It was suppressed finally along with the rise of Philip of Macedonia and the Empire of Alexander the Great. Among the other ancient city-states was Sparta, whose method of government, if compared with modern systems, would appear to have most in common with that of the Nazis.<sup>1</sup> This should have been a warning to the wise that not everything that came out of ancient Greece is good.

It is interesting to reflect that Macedonia, which gave rise to Philip and Alexander, reverted after their fall to a monarchy where the King was not considered a god, like Alexander and the Egyptian pharaohs, but took his decisions together with a council of aristocrats – in a manner similar to the pre-Conquest English.



## The Roman Empire

By far the most common form of government in the world until recent times was monarchy: a system that mirrors the rule of heaven, where God sits on high, worshipped by every power and principality. It was no accident that when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, the system of government was not changed. The bad things: the overbearing arrogance of its officials, the circuses and the selfishness of the aristocracy to which it gave rise, were excised and the New Roman Empire, purified and now based on Christian foundations, continued to exist for another millennium. It might have lasted longer had its western half not fallen into error and then destroyed its eastern half through sack and pillage.

This (eastern) Roman Empire actually had a vision of the universe as a sort of inverted cone, which was divided into clearly defined sections. Soaring at the top of the heavenly sphere were God the Father, Christ His Son, the Holy Ghost and the Blessed Virgin; St John accompanied by the archangels, seraphs, cherubim and angels came next; beneath them were assembled the evangelists, the prophets, the fathers of the Church and the ranks of saintly men and women. Separated from these by the ether, the emperor stood at the summit of the earthly sphere, accompanied by the Patriarch, his family and courtiers, and so down the social scale. Tamara Talbot Rice writes '... even though the Byzantines often acted with cruelty, harshness and meanness in both their private and their public affairs, Christian principles nevertheless remained all-important to them, and the respect with which they regarded the virtues on which Christianity was based was handed down from generation to generation to form the framework of Europe's essentially Christian civilization.'<sup>2</sup>

There seems to be a horror of any kind of personal rule nowadays, probably owing to the examples set by the recent dictatorships of Stalin, Hitler<sup>3</sup> and Mussolini. However what I am asking for is a monarchy, not a dictatorship, of which we had a home-grown example in the person of Oliver Cromwell, who has many things in common with his more recent followers. The difference between a dictatorship and a monarchy is that a dictator is not willing to allow the previous systems of government to continue. Dictators tend to have some kind of bee in their bonnet about how everyone should behave, and their rule is devoted

to imposing this idea by force. With Hitler it was Nazism, with Mussolini it was Fascism, with Stalin it was Communism (or at least the twisted version of it that Stalin professed) and with Cromwell it was Puritanism. As most of the English were already Protestant anyway, Cromwell, having carved a bloody path to power, merely contented himself with a period of very harsh rule, abolishing the time-honoured celebrations of Christmas, Easter, Mayday etc., and making most of the nation utterly miserable until he died. While his reign was not without bloodshed, he managed to contain his propensity for massacres, releasing it onto the Irish Catholics instead.

## The English Monarchy

In this country we have been credited with an ancient democracy, but in fact that is a myth put about by politicians, whose interest is to maintain an appearance of continuity with the past. In fact what we have was grafted onto what remained of the pre-conquest English monarchical system after the Normans, the Parliamentarians of the Civil War and the oligarchy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had finished with it, and is nothing like what prevailed in ancient Athens or even ancient England. In Athens, as we have seen, a very small proportion of the people voted on every single decision that was taken: in fact the limited population acted in a similar fashion to our House of Commons. This procedure would obviously be far too cumbersome to be transferred here today. (What happens in our system today is that from time to time we vote for a representative, who is then given carte-blanche to vote 'for us', in whatever way he likes.)

In England, having cast our vote for good or ill, we simply have to endure whatever happens, like it or not. Of course the government will pretend to listen to all the demonstrations and lobbyists, but one can be fairly confident that that is all they will do. They are in charge now: we have voted them in, and they will get on with their own policies in despite of us. If anything really serious comes up, on which we might reasonably hope and expect to have a say – for example the Lisbon Treaty – the Prime Minister simply signs it, without a referendum: the action, if I may say so, of a Dictator and not a Monarch.<sup>4</sup> No Monarch worth his salt would submit to the total erosion of his own sovereignty by a neighbouring dictatorial super-state. How can a government that does hope to inspire loyalty?

Even if you accept that this twisted version of what the Ancient Greeks practised is Democracy, it has only been in full operation since after the First World War, in fact in 1928, when Universal Suffrage, including that of women, came about. Until that time the suffrage was limited. The Second Reform Bill was passed as recently as 1867. Ballots were not secret until 1872, making the system before then open to intimidation or bribery. The monarch had far more say in what was actually done than happens today. Whereas the present Royal Family are pilloried if they should happen even to whisper anything that could be construed as interfering in politics, Queen Victoria, on one occasion, refused to appoint a Prime Minister whom she did not like, and King Edward VII did a great deal to engineer the *entente cordiale* with France which, until he developed a liking for the high-life of Paris, had been our traditional enemy.

It is significant that the French Revolution, embodying many of the principals on which our present day 'Democracy' is based, was regarded with abhorrence in England at the time, and we fought tooth and nail to have that particular demon pushed back into its box.

### Some of the Flaws of Democracy

The main problem with Democracy is that it is founded on an entirely and self-evidently false premise: that all men<sup>5</sup> are created equal. This is not to say that all men are not *spiritually* equal, and deserving of equal respect. A road-sweeper does as good and necessary a job as a brain surgeon in his own sphere. However no one would trust even the best road-sweeper with the government of a country, any more than one would expect a brain surgeon to sweep the roads. However it gives the less well-endowed folk a vastly inflated (and false) idea of their own importance, and increases their sensitivity to what they *think* are their rights, similarly decreasing any idea that they might have about their responsibilities. (It is interesting that in a recent documentary on the terrible shooting of a group of Amish children in America, one of the policemen said that the Amish culture was totally different to that of the U.S.A. He said that the U.S. culture puts the individual at the top of the pile, the community second and institutions third; while the Amish put their bishops at the top of the pile, their community second, and the individual right at the bottom).

This leads on to the second (equally flawed) premise that all men will therefore ultimately make a good decision. This was actually quickly demonstrated to be false as a direct consequence of the First World War. Woodrow Wilson imposed democracy on the central powers, because in his eyes the monarchical systems had started the fighting in the first place and that peace-loving democracies would live in harmony with each other. What actually happened was that France, with England, as it were, 'holding her coat', imposed morale-sapping limitations on Germany's armed forces, and demanded such swingeing reparations that she could not reasonably be expected to pay them.

The Germans, not surprisingly, voted in large numbers for a mad, down-and-out failed artist and Austrian corporal, wounded in the First World War, with some pretty radical ideas, who they thought would rescue them from their plight. Adolf Hitler, of course, once in a position of power, led them into a Second World War even more devastating to their country (and to civilisation in general) than the first had been.

Leaving aside these arguments, however, we have to see that Democracy in its Greek sense simply does not work in practice. When men want to build a tower, they don't just sit around and talk about it. If they did, they would probably either, in the words of the late comic Milton Berle, 'keep minutes and waste hours' and the result would be similar to the camel, which as someone else said, 'looks like a horse that was planned by a committee'. Eventually they have to appoint a master builder to be in charge. He will then tell the quarrymen to gather up some stones, and appoint an expert quarryman to be in charge of that. He will organise the delivery of the stones, and set skilled masons to carve them and raise them up, one upon another. In no time the tower is up!

A King is surely the expert in governing a country. He understands the many, complex threads that need to be pulled or tweaked in order to keep the country running in the right way. He guarantees stability, for when he dies, there will be someone else to continue, probably his son, who has already had half his life to watch and learn his father's craft, so that when the time comes he will be able to take the wheel and guide the ship of state as competently as ever.

Since we are dealing with human beings, there will always be bad or just plain incompetent kings, just as there will always be bad or incompetent

builders or plumbers; but the state should be sufficiently robust to weather the occasional bout of misrule, or, in extreme conditions, throw out the bad ruler and install someone who seems better suited to the job. As history teaches us, kings have sons, sons-in-law, brothers and there are also mothers, wives, sisters and daughters ...

Even the present day style of democracy does not work in practice, partly because what the modern democrats seem to want is not someone who is an expert at Government! They want someone who has some crackpot notion or other, like Whiggism, Toryism, Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, Nazism, Fascism, Social Democracy, Christian Democracy, Communism, Capitalism, Thatcherism, Blairism or any one of the thousand other fads that have plagued us since the beginning of the twentieth century when this democracy nonsense first became a serious contender for government of the world.

The result of this is that the arch-liberal, or conservative (or whatever) who has managed to bamboozle the public into believing that his particular '-ism' will do everything that they want, is enabled to gather about himself all the other like-minded people, and run the country for however long his term of office lasts. Most probably, by the end of this time, the public is heartily fed up with the particular fad that the first man professed, so they elect another man with a different fad, and he starts to undo all that the previous man had done and put in his own 'reforms'. As soon as these 'reforms' start bearing fruit, lo and behold, the public becomes disenchanted once again, and at the next election demands someone different. The result is that half of the country is constantly undoing the building that the other half of the country is putting up.

This gives rise to conditions which are not even those of a monarchy, where the power is at least neutral; but more like those of a succession of (elected) dictatorships, where we are forced to bow to the extreme opinions and actions of others with which we may be in wholehearted disagreement\*. The bombing of Yugoslavia and Iraq were not done at my behest (nor at the behest of a significant number of others), but because we live in a democracy we are tarnished with the stigma of having performed these acts, while the perpetrators of them take no responsibility and never have to carry the can when things go wrong. The worst that can happen to them is that they can be forced to

resign: not a great calamity, as Peter Mandelson has demonstrated on no less than two occasions.

I will now consider the knowledge and commitment necessary to be a democrat. Owing to the present system in England, one can never relax, secure in the knowledge that the government is being carried on by wise and far-sighted men who will do all that they can to ensure that as far as they can reasonably be expected to foresee events will continue to run on an even keel. One has constantly to worry about (to state a few campaigns off the top of my head): green issues, the campaign for the right to life (something that one could be pardoned for hoping would be enshrined in our constitution anyway), supporting the demonstration for peace in Iraq, or Israel or a dozen other places, and making a decision on the question of whether we should stay in the Common Market.

There are so many causes that one is hard put to it to know which and how many to support. One is often prevented by economics anyway, as each one demands a subscription for the printing of its leaflets, the canvassing of supporters etc. and the lobbying of the very M.P.s whom we have supposedly voted for in the first place. All of them can put up any number of experts with good reasons why their point of view should prevail, and you can be pretty sure that most of them have another organisation (and it is often the Government) that puts up equally compelling experts with equally compelling views in diametric opposition to them. It is not possible for the normal man in the street to devote enough time (or money) to all the organisations that he would like to support, or to have sufficient education in that particular field to judge on their particular point of view.

Many so-called experts have no qualifications at all in the field in which they choose to pontificate. The various protest movements will pick on anyone to champion their cause, if their celebrity status will guarantee them what they really want, which is attention. We find actors, who are doubtless brilliant at their particular craft, supporting all kinds of crank causes, about which they have nothing other than an opinion no better founded (and possibly worse) than anyone else's.

Furthermore, any particular parliamentary candidate can be guaranteed to favour at least one cause to which one is in complete opposition. A black<sup>7</sup> man in America would have felt a certain compulsion to vote for Barak Obama, but if he were also Roman Catholic or Orthodox he would



have felt an equal compulsion not to, on pro-Life issues. In America, I believe, they vote not only on candidates, but on various issues as well, taking democracy to extreme lengths – and more accurately mirroring the situation in ancient Athens. I would not be happy to vote on most of these, knowing that my ignorance on any of them is likely to be profound. Similarly I would not happily accept a result based on the combined ignorance of thousands of others.

This inherent instability is not only debilitating for the folk who live in the state, but is a destabilising influence on the countries round about, because they think 'Ah, Mr Socialist is in charge there at the moment, but there is an election coming up, and the chances are that Mr Capitalist is going to get in, so if we want to start our socialist revolution now would be a good time.' A good example of this is the recent conflict in Gaza, carefully timed to take place while the U.S. was between Presidents. The Israelis knew that Bush was basically on their side, but preoccupied with the impending changeover, whilst Obama, who was likely to be a moderating influence, was not able to do anything until he actually took power. This gave them the perfect opportunity to trash Gaza whilst the American back was turned. Had there been a King in America (a suggestion so unlikely that one feels a little strange even suggesting the possibility) they would probably not have got away with it.

The Americans seem to like their democracy, however, and presumably they have a right to get on with it. Those who don't like it presumably have the ultimate option of voting with their feet – or do they? The U.S. seem determined to export their democracy like some kind of modern plague, till it has become, willy-nilly, a one-size-fits-all solution for the rest of the world. It is incredible to me that a country that has got sufficient internal problems, stemming ultimately from its system of government, can nevertheless force it on other people. The Germans, Austrians, Iraqis and Afghans – all have been forcibly converted. It is arguably a highly inefficient system of government for a nation like ours that has only introduced it gradually over hundreds of years: so why the U.S. should think that Iraq and Afghanistan can manage it from scratch in no time at all, I simply don't know. Presumably, if the Afghans vote for a return of the Taliban, the U.S.A. will once again bomb them into submission. This is what the French did to Algeria a few years ago when the Algerians

voted for a Muslim government, not by bombing, but by setting up a pro-French, French-armed military junta in Algeria.

Democracy has failed, and I for one would like the old, pre-Conquest England back – the England which had a native-born, Orthodox Christian King who really ruled: an England which neither interfered in other nations affairs nor played lapdog to their rulers, in which so-called 'Gay Rights' were unknown, and in which Muslims and pagans, far from being kow-towed to at every opportunity, were recognized as enemies to peace.

For the convinced anti-democrat there is one bright light on the horizon, however. In March 2003, the results of a national referendum showed that nearly two-thirds of Liechtenstein's electorate agreed to vote in support of Prince Hans-Adam II's proposal of a renewed constitution, which replaced the version of 1921. The proposed constitution was criticised by many, including the Council of Europe, as expanding the powers of the monarchy, and the criticisms were accentuated by a threat by the ruling prince that if the constitution failed, he would, among other things, convert some of the royal property for commercial use<sup>8</sup>.

The U.S.A. does not have an embassy in Liechtenstein and it is Switzerland's job to keep good relations between herself, the U.S.A. and the tiny principality. Here's hoping the Swiss do that job well, or Liechtenstein could wake up tomorrow to find itself underneath the next American bombing raid.

1 *The Open Society and its Enemies* Vol. I: Karl Popper: Routledge and Keegan Paul 1945.

2 *Everyday Life in Byzantium*: Tamara Talbot Rice: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1967.

3 Hitler was a devotee of Oliver Cromwell (as was Mrs Thatcher), and is supposed to have had his biography as bedside reading. The Nazi Gauleiter were the direct descendants of the Major Generals.

4 Mr Blair actually promised us a referendum on the European Constitution, of which the Lisbon Treaty is the carbon copy by another name, but it did not happen – perhaps because the only two countries that were allowed a referendum voted against it.

5 I use 'men' in the sense of all mankind, i.e. including women as well. This is the sense in which it always used to be understood, and I refuse to employ the modern, politically correct 'person' foisted on us by those who do not know the history of the English language. It has almost reached the point where we have to say 'hu-person' instead of 'hu-man'.

6 The murder of seven million babies by abortion, a figure that continues to rise, both here and in the U.S.A. under the 'democracy' of Barak Obama and Gordon Brown, is one of the more important of these. The right to life from conception is not, it seems, considered important even



by the United Nations, which seems to have enshrined 'rights' as some kind of sacred mission.

- 7 I don't know what the politically correct word is at the moment, 'black' or 'coloured' or the complex term 'African-American'.

- 8 Luxembourg, on the other hand, where democracy has obviously run mad, has just altered its constitution to enable the parliament to sideline its monarch and pass measures approving abortion, something that the Grand Duke refused to allow.

# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



I believe that you wrote a service to 'All the Saints of the Isles'. Why did you not rather compile a service to All the English Saints? After all both the journal and the site are called *Orthodox 'England'*.

*T. L., King's Lynn*

First of all, we never celebrate the saints of a certain nationality, we celebrate the saints who 'shone forth' in a particular land, that is on a particular territory. Thus, we could not celebrate all the 'English saints'. As regards 'All the Saints of England', I did think about this, but it seems to me almost impossible to separate the Saints of England from the Saints of the Isles. What for example would we do about St Aidan or St Fursey? Both were Irish and yet spent time in England and St Aidan became a saint here. Were they saints of England? What about St Cuthbert – English, but Irish-trained? Then there are the cases of St Augustine (Italian) and those many 'foreigners' with him, like St Paulinus, St Mellitus, St Justus, or St Felix and St Birinus (both from France). What of St Gregory, called 'Apostle of the English', though he never even set foot here? And what of St Alban himself? He certainly was neither English nor 'of England', because England did not then even exist.

It seems to me that a service to All the Saints of England would risk being nationalistic and there is no place for nationalism or ideas of racial 'purity' in the Church. Many complain about the nationalism of Greeks, Russians etc, but they fail to see the beam in their own eye – that many ex-Anglicans who have joined the Orthodox Church through one or another jurisdiction may also be racist and therefore divisive. In the Church we are together and we do not know go into schism, as some have done, because there are people in Church who are of a different nationality



What do you do if you are in a situation where you have to pray

together with Non-Orthodox? In order to avoid common prayer with heretics, would you walk out of the room?

*L. S., Colchester*

Since their intention is good, we should be respectful and diplomatic. I simply repeat the Jesus Prayer inside myself, physically staying in the same place. Anything else would be misunderstood and do more harm than good. We should look to the bigger picture, how we can do the most good. Rigidity can be good, but flexibility is good too.



Are the following Orthodox names: Charlotte, Pamela, Lance?

*P. A., London*

Charlotte is not, since it is the feminine form of Charles. Pamela (like Belinda and Wendy) is not, since it is a name invented by a fiction writer. Lance, however, can be considered to be an Orthodox name, since it is only Longinus in translation



Why do Orthodox practise infrequent communion?

*P. L., Colchester*

I think the question needs turning on its head. It should be: 'Why do Non-Orthodox take communion so frequently?' The answer to this must be that the Roman Catholic and Protestant faiths are non-ascetic and even anti-ascetic. In the Church we are ascetic – this is the nature of the Church and the authentic Christian Faith. Thus, in the Church we stand, we fast, we pray. Communion is not some sort of magic – without fasting and prayer communion may bring little self-improvement. It can even be to condemnation, in the words of the Apostle Paul. Thus, Anglicans and Roman Catholics have no confession before communion, have no prayer rule before communion, they can have a meat-filled breakfast just before communion, they sit down comfortably

during short services, everything is arranged for their physical comfort. In Orthodoxy we do not flatter the body in this way and we take communion very seriously.



I know this is an old question, but what do you think of the chances of an English Orthodox Church being formed?

T. M., London

Frankly, with the continuing apostasy from any sort of faith in this country, I would say that it is impossible in the foreseeable future. Moreover, given the temptations of phyletist nationalism and racism among many English people, as we have seen from the creation of two separate and divisive, more or less ex-Anglican jurisdictions over the last few years, it is clear that the English are not ready to have their own national Church. We have to be mature, adult, in order to have a national Church and this means working together with other nationalities, who have a far better understanding of Orthodoxy than recent converts.

In any case, I think we need Regional Churches, not national ones. If a Local Church is formed, then we must not be immature. And immature is another word for premature. It takes several generations to form a Local Church. We have had the example of the creation of the OCA, called by some (in some cases unfairly) 'Eastern-rite Protestantism'. For nearly forty years the OCA has been accompanied by horrible scandals and schisms and also tensions between Canadians and Americans. Some say it is doomed, despite the recent election of their first competent Metropolitan. Perhaps it would have been better to have formed a 'Church of the Americas'. Thus, the Protestant temptations for the OCA in the USA would have been balanced out by the Roman Catholic temptations of the many other countries in the Americas.

In the same way, the only chance of some sort of Local Church in these islands (and we should not divide England from the other peoples in these islands) is the hope of being part of a Western European Church. So, I think we need Regional Churches, covering many countries. This would avoid nationalistic temptations and also lead to the historical restoration of the Church in these islands, as it was 1,000 years ago, as part of a wider Western European Church, not another narrow and insular Anglican creation. That would be to repeat the nationalistic error of the sixteenth century.



What would you say about Thomas a Kempis' book *The Imitation of Christ* from an Orthodox viewpoint?

B. E., Oxford

There is much that is good in this work, but its nature is essentially Roman Catholic, mediæval and pietistic. Coming from the age of Scholasticism, Kempis expressed in piety the Aristotelian concept of outward imitation, so beloved of Roman Catholic 'spirituality'. This was later seen in the Jesuits encouragement of theatre acting, with the idea that if we act the parts of saints, then we will become like them. This leads to pure hypocrisy and the Middle Ages were very hypocritical, as we can see from reading, say, Chaucer. This type of 'imitation' is not Orthodox.

Orthodoxy is inward, we do not talk about 'imitating Christ', but living in Christ. Read the Gospel, the Lives of the Saints, Unseen Warfare by St Nicodemus and St Theophan, the *Spiritual Meadow* of St John Moschos, the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, the simpler parts of the *Philokalia*, not Thomas a Kempis, despite certain virtues in the book. There is always a danger of falling into spiritual delusion with such Roman Catholic works. I have seen this happening to people.



Is Pope Nicholas I ('the Great') an Orthodox saint or a Catholic saint?

There is some confusion here. Fr Justin Popovich was very negative about him, but I have heard a Serbian bishop calling him a saint. He was born and died before 1054.

S. S., Kovan, Serbia

I think that this problem comes from the fact that for Roman Catholicism Pope Nicholas 'the Great' (858-67) is a saint. He was called a saint only in 1630 – so even the heretics took their time in canonising him! Those Orthodox who call him a saint are simply repeating the Roman Catholic title, which does not apply for Orthodox. Fr Justin is absolutely right. It is clear that he is not a saint for us, because he fought against Orthodoxy and against St Photius, for the *filioque* heresy.

We should not forget that even Charlemagne is called 'Blessed' by the Roman Catholics. Yet history clearly shows us that he was an immoral monster as well as a heretic. Even before 1054 there were heretics in what was then still part of the Western Church. This should not surprise us. This was the same in the Eastern part of the Church, for Arius and Nestorius were also at one point

members of the Eastern part of the Church, but were also heretics.

Pope Nicholas was in fact a warning, an omen, for in himself he showed everyone what would happen if pro-Frankish popes like him came to control the Western part of the Church – that is he presaged the heretical German popes of the eleventh century, like Leo IV (1049–1054), also considered by Roman Catholicism to be a saint and the notorious Gregory VII (Hildebrand) (1073–1085 – also a saint for Roman Catholicism). It can truly be said that Pope Nicholas was the first papist, given by God as a warning. His papism can be seen in his pretensions in Bulgaria, after which he was excommunicated and deposed by St Photius (Nicholas therefore died outside the Church, without repentance). Sadly, the West did not heed this warning and so in the eleventh century it completely fell away from Orthodoxy.

The existence of Pope Nicholas does not mean that all the popes just before him or just after him were heretics. For example there was Leo III who at the beginning of the ninth century told Charlemagne that the *filioque* was doctrinally unsound (this is an error in *The Orthodox Church* by Timothy Ware, where the author mistakenly says the opposite, following Roman Catholic sources). In Rome Leo III set up huge plates engraved in Latin and Greek with the real Nicene Creed written on them. Notably, there is John VIII (872–882), who reconciled all in the West with Orthodoxy at the Council of Constantinople in 879 (some Greeks call this the Eighth Ecumenical Council). Pope John also supported St Methodius in Moravia against the barbarian Germans. In fact, he was assassinated – the first Pope ever to be assassinated – and some Orthodox consider him to have been a martyr. Certainly he was a hero for the Orthodox Faith.



Two questions. Firstly, who wrote the *Homilies of the Pseudo-Macarius*, as published by the Jesuit Fr G. Maloney in his 'Classics of Western Spirituality' series? A second question: Why is it that so many Western intellectuals never really become Orthodox, even after decades in the Church?

*(Identity withheld)*

The reason why Maloney calls his series 'Classics of "Western" Spirituality' eluded me for many years. Then I realised that it is because he is simply debasing Orthodox spirituality to the level of Western intellectualism in the Jesuit manner.

These homilies are by St Macarius, or perhaps by someone in Syria inspired by him – perhaps a spiritual son, in the same way that the Gospel of St Mark may have been dictated by the illiterate Apostle Peter to St Mark, in the same way that the works of 'the Pseudo-Dionysius' may be by someone who lived in the 6th century and who was inspired by St Dionysius to Christianise Platonism – just as the Platonist St Dionysius had done by being baptised in the first century, or in the same way that parts of Shakespeare's plays were not written by Shakespeare, but by his pupils, or in the same way that some of Michelangelo's paintings were painted by his pupils and not him.

Only academics can be bothered by authorship (and copyright). The Christian reaction to authorship is 'So what? If someone was inspired by the Holy Spirit and we benefit from those works, the authorship is utterly irrelevant. People get their rewards for authorship among the saints and angels in heaven, not among the bookworms and theoreticians in academia.

All of this highlights certain facts. All too many (but not all) Western intellectual converts to Orthodoxy begin by being touched by the Faith and start with zeal, but then fall away, as their zeal turns to the mere human (natural to them) desire to intellectualise, rationalize, syncretize and also enter hairsplitting arguments with each other (so that they make themselves feel comfortable).

They should ask themselves this question: What is Orthodox?

Orthodox is not secular conferences, it is being at services.

Orthodox is not high level philosophy and speculation, but wearing out your prayerbook.

Orthodox is not the university, it is the monastery.

Orthodox is not observing the university curriculum, it is observing the Church calendar (That is why all such intellectuals claim with such absurd pride that 'the calendar is not important, I am so Orthodox that I celebrate on both calendars'. That was not the attitude of the saints. What the intellectuals mean is that the calendar is not important to them. Thus they condemn themselves out of their own mouths, for they are saying that the saints are not important to them).

All these are obsessed by outer knowledge, called '*scientia/science*', knowledge about, in other words, speculation. They should be obsessed by inner knowledge, called wisdom, knowledge of, in other words experience.

They should be obsessed by the fire of spiritual life in the soul, not by death and mere dry booklore and academic writings, but by the living Spirit, which Maloney and all the others do their best to quench – despite the New Testament commandment – 'Quench not the Spirit'. These are the dead devout of dead religions, not the living Faithful. They kill through rationalization, intellectualisation, failing to live.

This is why Orthodox do not read very much – we are too busy living Christianity, which is the definition of Orthodoxy.

These Homilies of St Macarius, like the writings of St Symeon the New Theologian, are high-level and monastic. They can lead people into trouble and illusions. Read rather *Unseen Warfare* or St John Moschos or St Ignatius and St Theophan the Recluse, the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* or St John Cassian.



Is it true that the Old Believer sign of the cross made with two fingers was an abuse?

A. B., Felixstowe

No, it was not. There were in ancient times at least two ways of arranging the five fingers in order to make three and two in memory of the Holy Trinity and the two natures of Christ. When Russia was converted, only one way was introduced. As can be seen from ancient Russian icons and also the relics of certain ancient saints, the Russians held firmly to the old Greek way. In the seventeenth century the Greeks and all other Orthodox had adopted the alternative arrangement of the fingers. It was then the Russians who had to adapt. Sadly, for political reasons, this caused the Old Ritualist (in English sometimes called Old Believer) schism. The fact that formerly Greeks too arranged their fingers in what is now the Old Ritualist manner can be seen from the writings of St John of Damascus in Volume III of the *Philokalia*.



Where do heresies come from?

S. L., USA

Always from spiritual impurity in the soul.



What psychological problems do converts face on joining the Orthodox Church?

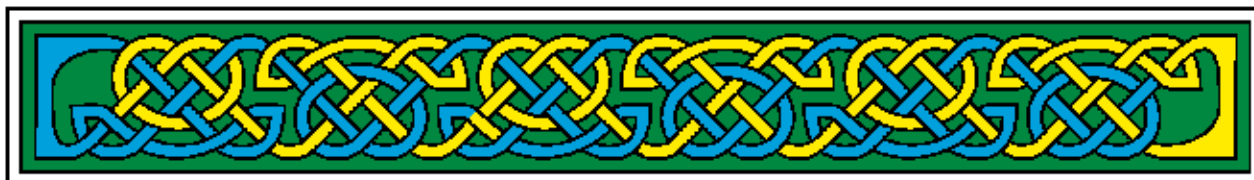
P. N., France

You do well to mention the word 'psychological'. I think that many converts to the Church, realising that they have to start from the beginning, suffer an inferiority complex and think that they have to be something that they are not. I always tell new converts 'Be what you are'.

For instance, sometimes converts go through the delusion of thinking that they must be someone else, speaking or dressing differently. This delusion is dangerous because it opens the way to pretentiousness, but the Gospel tells us to be as little children. One of the great myths is that converts think that Orthodoxy is not Christianity. In fact, Orthodoxy is only Christianity – that is without all the Roman Catholic and Protestant add-ons and take-aways.

Thus, some converts set themselves up as experts on Orthodoxy, always quoting 'the Fathers' out of context, others dress in a special 'uniform' for Church. But neither knowledge nor clothes will save our souls. That should be obvious. Others become quite fanatical, always quoting 'the canons' out of context, falsely thinking that extremism is Orthodox. Some become very syncretistic, showing that they have not cut their ties with the impurity of secular social, cultural and national conventions and have no intention of doing so. Some from a Protestant background are very anti-clerical, violently anti-episcopal and cut themselves off from communion with the rest of the Church, setting themselves up as gurus, failing to understand that the Church is episcopal. Others, from a Roman Catholic background, become very sentimental and pietistic.

All of the above is psychological, not theological. If only people could be more natural!





## CHILDHOOD IN THE LIGHT OF ORTHODOXY

### 2. Growing up in the English Countryside

**M**Y childhood was haunted by a sense of otherness. I knew that I did not belong to the world around me, sensing either that I had come from a different time or else from a different place. The traditional values of my many great-uncles and great-aunts and others, factory-workers and agricultural labourers, solid nineteenth-century people, gave me clues that at the very least my roots lay in the distant past beyond even them. For I realised that even their values were only vestiges of something far greater, remnants of a lost paradise. And it was there, at that paradise, at the roots of all this, that I wanted to arrive, for it was there that I belonged. Hence I had little time for what was false, not frank, not authentic, modernist, superficial, rootless and invented. I had time only for what was at the root of everything.

Five years old, I had the sense that that paradise was just near, just over the hill, beyond Abbey Lane where I grew up, where lay the ruins of the old monastery, despoiled over 400 years before at the Deformation, just beyond, at Skye Green. Paradise was in the presence, which I sensed lying just beyond, in the transcendent beauty only reflected in the fields, woods and broad skies, beneath which I was born. Later it was perhaps all this that gave me a sympathy with uprooted and dispossessed White Russians and their descendants, who had also seen their monasteries despoiled by atheists.

Six years later, when I was eleven years old, I had well understood the ugliness of the modern world and its alien-ness to me. I was no part of the worldliness of that world, to which I did not belong. It was then that a number of things were revealed to me. Standing on a field in Colchester, when I was twelve, I realised that my destiny was linked with Russia and that I had to teach myself that language. When I was fourteen, I read for the first time in my life the Gospel. When I was sixteen, almost all my future tasks were shown to me and the future course of my life revealed in all, except in the details, how, when, where, who etc.

My spiritual home was both in another time and in another place. Thanks to many childhood clues, I at last managed to identify where my previous spiritual home had been, in a long since vanished England, of which only fragments remained. As for

my present spiritual home, it was elsewhere – in Orthodox Russia.

Some knowledge was revealed to me then and later. Then I was at last able to put into words the keenly felt intuitions that I had always felt and always struggled to express and would struggle to express for the rest of my life. I had to wait until I was sixteen before I could make my way to an actual Russian church (now, sadly, disappeared). There at once I felt at home, as though I had been there all my life. Thus, everything had been decided by childhood experiences and intuitions. The rest of my life was to struggle to put it all into words.

In childhood I had become conscious, despite myself and my human weaknesses, of a sense of destiny and purpose of being. I had been put into the world, much to my reluctance, to express something. Imposed on me was the affliction of having to say things, however unpopular. I had to tell the truth that had been given to me, come what might, all the time oppressed by the overwhelming sense of the approaching end, the presence of evil. However, I already sensed then that Russia would escape from the Soviets. I also knew that her destiny, despite many Russians themselves and however unlikely it seemed in the early seventies, was messianic. But I did not know when or how any of this would come to be.

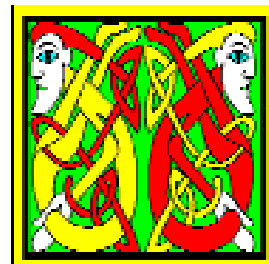
All this I had to express, I had to write down, however awkwardly, whatever the cost to me. I did not want to do this. Here was the burden and frustration of the affliction of knowing what would happen and watching the mistakes of resisting the inevitable being made. So I experienced the burden of knowing, but not being allowed to control. This frustration is, of course, vital for humility's sake. It is so easy to fall to our common enemy, pride. But I still had to tell the truth, come what may, and so all my life I have repeated: *'I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord'*.

# OPINION PAGE

## Genesis tells us we have a duty to protect the planet

*By Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth.*

(The Times, Saturday April 5 2008).



If we understood the first chapter of Genesis, we might put an end to some of the needless arguments between scientists and religious believers.

The first thing to note is its sheer brevity. It takes a mere 34 verses. The Hebrew Bible takes some 15 times as long to describe the Israelites' creation of the sanctuary in the wilderness. It is astonishing that the world's greatest and most influential account of the origins of the Universe is so short.

Next is its numerical structure. We know the significance of the number seven. The Universe is made in seven days. Seven times the word 'good' is used. But the pattern goes deeper than that. The first verse of Genesis contains seven Hebrew words, the second, fourteen.

The account of the seventh day contains 35. The word 'God' appears 35 times; the word 'Earth' 21. The entire passage contains 469 ( $7 \times 67$ ) words. By these hints, something is being intimated. The Universe has a structure, and it is mathematical.

Then there is the structure itself. On the first three days God creates domains: light and dark upper and lower waters, sea and dry land. On the next three days He populates these domains one by one: first the Sun, Moon and stars, then birds and fish, then land animals and human beings. The seventh day is holy. So six (the days of creation) symbolises the natural order, seven the supernatural.

As if by way of unintended confirmation, Sir Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal, wrote a book, *Just Six Numbers*, in which he showed that the entire structure of the physical Universe is determined by six mathematical constants.

Beyond these structural features is a sharp polemic. Most readers of the Bible are only dimly aware of the degree to which it is shaped by a polemic against myth. In the case of Genesis 1 this is obvious. What is missing is the element of struggle between rival gods that dominates all mythical accounts of creation. In the biblical account there is no opposition, no conflict. God speaks and the world comes into being. Max Weber called this the 'disenchantment', the

demythologising, of the world. He believed it to be the foundation of Western rationalism.

There are times when the polemic is more subtle. Read the account of the second day, when the waters are divided, and you will see that it alone of the six days lacks the word 'good'.

Instead, 'good' appears twice on the third day. This is an allusion to one of the most common features of myth: the primal battle against the goddess of the sea, symbol of the forces of chaos. The Bible dismisses this in a single oblique reference, that imposing order on the primal waters took one and a half days instead of one. The creation account is anti-myth.

So Genesis 1 is not a proto-scientific account of the birth of the Universe and the Big Bang. Its purpose is clear. The Universe is good: hence world-denying nihilism is ruled out. It is the result of a single creative will, so myth is eliminated. The Universe is a place of structure and order, so the text is an invitation to science, by implying that the world is not irrational and ruled by capricious powers.

Why then is Genesis 1 there? We are puzzled by that question because we forget that the Hebrew Bible is called, in Judaism, *Torah*, meaning teaching, guidance, or more specifically, law. Genesis 1 is best understood not as pseudo-science, still less as myth, but as jurisprudence; that is to say, as the foundation of the moral law. God created the world; therefore God owns the world. We are His guests – strangers and temporary residents, as the Bible puts it. God has the right to specify the conditions of our tenancy on Earth. The radical message of Genesis 1 is that divine sovereignty is constitutional. God rules not by might but by right and so must we.

So Genesis 1 can be restated in terms with which even the most avowed secularist might agree. The world does not belong to us. We hold it as trustees on behalf of those who will come after us.

Renouncing our ownership of the Earth is all we need to ground what is surely the fundamental point of the story itself: that we are here to protect, not destroy or endanger, the Earth and all it contains.

# SILCHESTER

Plan of the Roman church at Silchester. Very few buildings in Roman towns have been identified as Christian churches, and although the heat of the Pelagian controversy shows that Christian communities were active, the only churches known are small buildings which can only have housed a relatively small congregation. The stand outside the west door may well have been for an outside font for baptisms

