

FROM THE FATHERS

“IF A KING wishes to subdue a city belonging to enemies, he first of all keeps them without bread and water, for the enemy, being in this way harassed by hunger, becomes subject to him; and thus it is in respect to the hostile passions, for if a man endure fasting and hunger regularly, his enemies become stricken with weakness in the soul.”

ABBA JOHN FROM THE PARADISE OF THE HOLY FATHERS,
3RD & 4TH CENTURIES

“BE NOT deceived: you will not be delivered from Pharaoh, and you will not see the Heavenly Passover, unless you continually eat bitter herbs and unleavened bread. And bitter herbs - this is the coercion and pain of fasting; and unleavened bread - this is a mind that is not puffed up.”

VENERABLE JOHN OF THE LADDER, SIXTH CENTURY

“FASTING is an ordinance of the Church, obliging the Christian to observe it on specific days. Concerning fasting our Saviour teaches: *When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father Who is in secret: and thy Father, Who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.* From what the Saviour teaches, we learn that fasting

is pleasing to God, and that he who fasts for the uplifting of his mind and heart towards God shall be rewarded by God, Who is the most liberal Bestower of Divine gifts, for his devotion.”

SAINT NECTARIUS OF PENTAPOLIS,
THE WONDERWORKER OF AEGINA, + 1920 A.D.



PARADISE AND HELL

IN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

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ON MEATFARE SUNDAY, as we prepare for the commencement of the Holy and Great Lent, we commemorate the *Second and Incorruptible Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The expression “we commemorate” confirms that our Church, as the Body of Christ, re-enacts in its worship the Second Coming of our Lord as an event and not just something that is historically expected. The reason is that through the Divine Eucharist, we are transported to the celestial kingdom, to *meta*-history. It is in this Orthodox perspective that the subject of Paradise and hell is approached.

In the Gospels (Matthew, Ch. 5), mention is made of **kingdom** and **eternal fire**. In this excerpt, the *kingdom* is the divine destination of mankind. The *fire* is “prepared” for the devil and his “angels” (demons), not because God desired it, but because they are impenitent. The *kingdom* is *prepared* for those who remain faithful to the will of God. **Kingdom** (the uncreated glory) is Paradise. **Fire** (eternal) is hell (Matthew 5:22). At the beginning of history, God invites man into Paradise, into a communion with His uncreated Grace. At the end of history, man has to

face Paradise and hell. What this means, we shall see, is further down. We do however stress that it is one of the central subjects of our faith – it is Orthodox Christianity’s philosophical cornerstone.

(1) Mention of Paradise and hell in the New Testament is frequent. In Luke 23:43, Christ says to the robber on the cross: *Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise* (Luke 23:43). However, the robber also refers to Paradise, when he says: *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom* (Luke 23:42). According to St. Theophylaktos of Bulgaria, “for the robber was in Paradise, in other words, the kingdom.” The Apostle Paul (2 Cor 12:3-4) confesses (of himself): *And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth.) How that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.* In Revelations we read: *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God* (Rev 27). And Arethas of Caesaria interprets: “Paradise is understood to be the blessed and eternal life.” Thus, Paradise, eternal life, Kingdom of God, are all related.

(2) Paradise and hell are not two different places. This separation idea is an idolatrous concept. They instead signify two different situations (ways), which originate from the same uncreated source, and are perceived by man as two, different experiences. Or, more precisely, they are the same experience, except that they are perceived differently by man, depending on man’s internal state. This experience is the sight of Christ inside the uncreated light of His divinity, of His *glory*. From the moment of His Second Coming, through eternity, all people will be seeing Christ in His uncreated light. That is ... *the hour is coming, ... all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation* (Jn 5:28-29). In the presence of Christ, mankind will be separated (*sheep* and *goats*, to His right and His left). In other words, they will be discerned in two separate groups: those who will be looking upon Christ as Paradise and those who will be looking upon Christ as hell. *For our God is a consuming fire* (Heb. 12:29).

Paradise and hell are the same reality.

This is what is depicted in the portrayal [icon] of the Second Coming. From Christ a river flows forth: it is radiant like a golden light at the upper end of it, where the saints are. At its lower end, the same river is fiery, and it is in that part of the river that the demons and the unrepentant (“the never repentant” according to a hymn) are depicted. This is why in Luke 2:34 we read that Christ stands as *the fall and the rising (resurrection) of many*. Christ becomes the resurrection into eternal life, for those who accepted Him and who followed the suggested means of healing the heart; and to those who rejected Him, He becomes their demise and their hell.

There exist numerous patristic testimonies: St. John of the Ladder says that the uncreated light of Christ is “an all-consuming fire and an illuminating light.” St. Gregory Palamas observes: “Thus, it is said, He will baptize you by the Holy Spirit and by fire: in other words, by illumination and punishment, depending on each person’s predisposition, which will bring upon him that which he deserves.” Elsewhere, the light of Christ, “albeit one and accessible to all, is not partaken of uniformly, but differently.”

Consequently, Paradise and hell are not a reward or a punishment (condemnation), but the way that we individually experience the sight of Christ, depending on the condition of our heart. God does not punish in essence, although, for educative purposes, the Scripture does mention punishment. The more spiritual one becomes, the better he can comprehend the Scripture and our traditions. Man’s condition (clean/unclean, repentant/unrepentant) is the factor that determines the acceptance of the Light as “Paradise” or “hell.”

(3) The anthropological issue in Orthodoxy is that redeemed man will eternally look upon Christ as Paradise and not as hell; that man will partake of His heavenly and eternal *Kingdom*. And this is where we see the difference between Christianity as Orthodoxy and the various other religions. The other religions promise a certain “blissful” state, even after death. Orthodoxy however is not a quest for bliss, but a cure from the illness of religion, as the late Fr. John Romanides so patristically teaches. Orthodoxy is an open hospital within history (“spiritual infirmary” according to St. John the Chrysostom), which offers the healing (catharsis) of the heart, in order to finally attain “theosis”- the only

destination of man. This is the course that has been so comprehensively described by Fr. John Romanides and the Rev. Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, Hierotheos (Vlachos); it is the healing of mankind, as experienced by all of our Saints.

This is the meaning of life in the body of Christ (the Church) and the Church's reason for existence. St. Gregory Palamas (in his 4th Homily on the Second Coming) says that the pre-eternal will of God for man is "to find a place in the majesty of the divine kingdom" - to reach theosis. That was the purpose of creation. And he continues: But even His divine and secret *kenosis*, His God-human conduct, His redemptory passions, and every single mystery (in other words, all of Christ's opus on earth) were all providentially and omnisciently pre-determined for this very end (purpose).

(4) The important thing, however, is that not all people respond to this invitation of Christ, and that is why not everyone partakes in the same way of His uncreated glory. This is taught by Christ, in the parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus (Luke, Ch. 16). Man refuses Christ's offer, **he becomes God's enemy** and rejects the redemption offered by Christ (which is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit – it is within the Holy Spirit that we accept the calling of Christ). This is the "never repentant" person referred to in the hymn. **God "never bears enmity," the blessed Chrysostom observes; it is we who become His enemies; we are the ones who reject Him. The unrepentant man becomes demonized, because he has chosen to.** God doesn't want this. St. Gregory Palamas says: "...for this was not My pre-existing will; I did not create you for this purpose; I did not prepare the pyre for you. This undying pyre was pre-fired for the demons who bear the unchanging trait of evil, to whom your own unrepentant opinion attracted you." "The cohabitation with mischievous angels is arbitrary (voluntary)." **In other words, it is something that is freely chosen by man.**

Both the rich man and Lazarus were looking upon the same reality, i.e., God in His uncreated light. The rich man reached the Truth, the sight of Christ, but could not partake of it, as Lazarus did. The poor Lazarus received "consolation," whereas the rich man received "an-

guish.” Christ’s words, that they “have Moses and the prophets” – for those still in the world – signifies that we are all inexcusable. Because we have the Saints, who have experienced *theosis* and who call upon us to accede to their way of life so that we too might reach *theosis* like they did. We therefore conclude that those who have chosen evil ways - like the rich man - are inexcusable.

Our stance towards our fellow man is indicative of our inner state, and that is why this will be the criterion of Judgment Day, during Christ’s Second Coming. This doesn’t imply that faith, or man’s faithfulness to Christ is disregarded; faith is naturally a prerequisite, because our stance towards each other will show whether or not we have God within us. The first Sundays of the Triodion preceding Lent revolve around fellow man. On the first of these Sundays, the (seemingly pious) Pharisee justifies (sanctifies) himself and rejects (derogates) the Tax-collector. On the second Sunday, the “elder” brother (a repetition of the seemingly pious Pharisee) is sorrowed by the return (salvation) of his brother. Likewise seemingly pious, he too had false piety, which did not produce love. On the third (Carnival) Sunday, this stance reaches Christ’s seat of judgment, and is evidenced as the criterion for our eternal life.

(5) The experience of Paradise or hell is beyond words or senses. It is an uncreated reality, not a created one. The Franks [*i.e. Roman Catholic Westerners, and thus also their Protestant successors - ed.*] created the myth that Paradise and hell are both created realities. It is a myth that the damned will not be looking upon God; just as the “absence of God” is equally a myth. The Franks had also perceived the fires of hell as something created (e.g. Dante’s *Inferno*). Orthodox tradition has remained faithful to the Scriptural claim that the damned shall see God (like the rich man of the parable), but will perceive Him only as “an all-consuming fire.” The Frankish scholastics accepted hell as punishment and the deprivation of a tangible vision of the divine essence. Biblically and patristically however, “hell” is understood as man’s failure to collaborate with Divine Grace, in order to reach the “illuminating” view of God (Paradise) and selfless love. Consequently, there is no such thing as “God’s absence,” only His presence. That is why His Second Coming is dire (“O, what an hour it will be then,” we chant in the Laudatory

hymns). It is an irrefutable reality, toward which Orthodoxy is permanently oriented: *I anticipate resurrection of the dead*

The damned – those who are depraved at heart, just like the Pharisees – eternally perceive the pyre of hell as their salvation! It is because their condition is not susceptible to any other form of salvation. They too are “finalized” – they reach the end of their road – **but only the righteous reach the end of the road as saved persons. The others finish as damned.** “Salvation” to them is hell, since in their lifetime, they pursued only pleasure. The rich man of the parable had “enjoyed all of his riches.” The poor Lazarus uncomplainingly endured “every suffering.”

The Apostle Paul expresses this (1 Corinthians 3:13-15):

Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

The righteous and the unrepentant **shall both pass through the uncreated “fire” of Divine presence, however, the one shall pass through unscathed, while the other shall be burnt.** He too is “saved,” but only in the way that one passes through a fire. Eftimios Zigavinos (a 12th century theologian) indicates: “God is fire that illuminates and brightens the pure, and burns and obscures the unclean.” And Theodoritos Kyrou (regarding this “saving”) writes: “One is also saved by fire, being tested by it,” just as when one passes through fire. If he has an appropriate protective cover, he will not be burnt? otherwise, he may be “saved,” but he will be charred!

Consequently, the fire of hell has nothing in common with the Frankish “purgatory,” nor is it created, nor is it punishment, or an intermediate stage. A viewpoint such as this is virtually a transference of one’s accountability to God. The accountability is entirely our own, whether we choose to accept or reject the salvation (healing) that is offered by God. “Spiritual death” is the viewing of the uncreated light, of divine glory, as a pyre, as fire. St John the Chrysostom in his 9th homily on Corinthians I, notes: “Hell is never-ending... sinners shall be

judged into a never-ending suffering. As for the ‘being burnt altogether,’ it means this: that he does not withstand the strength of the fire.” And he continues: “And he (St. Paul) says, it means this: that he shall not be thus burnt also - like his works - into nothingness, but he shall continue to exist, only inside that fire. He therefore considers this as his ‘salvation.’ For it is customary for us to say ‘saved in the fire,’ when referring to materials that are not totally burnt away.”

Scholastic perceptions-interpretations, which, through Dante’s work (Inferno) have permeated our world, have consequences that amount to idolatrous views. An example is the separation of Paradise and hell as two different places. This has happened, because they did not distinguish between the created and the uncreated. Also, the denial of hell’s eternity, with their idea of the “restoration” of everything, or the concept of a “good God” (Bon Dieu). God is indeed benevolent (Mat 8:17), since He offers salvation to everyone. (*He wants all to be saved.* .. per I Tim 2:4). However, the words of our Lord, as heard during the funeral service, are formidable: *I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just* (John 5:30).

Equally manufactured is the concept of “theodicy,” which applies in this case. Everything is finally attributed to God alone (i.e., if He intends to redeem or condemn), without taking into consideration man’s “collaboration” as a factor of redemption. Salvation is possible, only within the framework of collaboration between man and Divine Grace. According to the blessed Chrysostom, “the utmost, almost everything, is God’s; He did however leave something little to us.” That “little something” is our acceptance of God’s invitation. The robber on the cross was saved, “by using the key request of *remember me...*”

Finally, idolatrous also is the perception of a God becoming outraged against a sinner, whereas we mentioned earlier that God “never shows enmity.” This is a juridical perception of God, which also leads to the prospect of “penances” in confessions as forms of punishment, and not as medications (means of healing).

(6) The mystery of Paradise-hell is also experienced in the life of the Church in the world. During the sacraments, there is a participa-

tion of the faithful in Grace, so that Grace may be activated in our lives, by our course towards Christ. Especially during the Divine Eucharist, the Uncreated - Holy Communion - becomes inside us either Paradise or hell, depending on our condition. But mostly, our participation in Holy Communion is a participation in Paradise or hell, throughout history. That is why we beseech God, prior to receiving Holy Communion, to render the Precious Gifts inside us not as judgment or condemnation, or as eternal damnation.

Participation in Holy Communion is thus linked to the overall spiritual course of the faithful. When we approach Holy Communion uncleaned and unrepentant, we are condemned (burnt). Holy Communion inside us becomes the “inferno” and “spiritual death.” Not because it is transformed into those things of course, but because our own uncleanliness cannot accept Holy Communion as “Paradise.” Given that Holy Communion is called “medication for immortality” (St. Ignatius the God-bearer, 2nd century), the same thing exactly occurs as with any medication. If our organism does not have the prerequisites to absorb the medication, then the medication will produce side-effects and will kill instead of heal. It is not the medication that is responsible, but the condition of our organism. It must be stressed, that if we do not accept Christianity as a therapeutic process, and its sacraments as spiritual medication, then we are led to a “religionizing” of Christianity; in other words, we “idolatrize” it. And unfortunately, this is a frequent occurrence, when we perceive Christianity as a “religion.”

St. Basil the Great tells us: “Everything we do is in preparation of another life.” Our life must be a continuous preparation for our participation in “Paradise” - our community with the Uncreated. And everything begins from this lifetime. That is why the Apostle Paul says: “*Behold, now is the opportune time. Behold, now is the day of redemption*” (2 Cor 6:2).

Every moment of our lives is of redemptive importance. Either we gain eternity, the eternal community with God, or we lose it. Consequently, we can now understand why oriental religions and cults that preach reincarnations are injuring mankind; they are virtually transferring the problem to other, (nonexistent, of course) lifetimes. The truth is, however, that only one life corresponds to each of us, whether we are

saved or condemned. This is why St. Basil the Great continues: “Those things therefore that lead us towards that life, we need to say should be cherished and pursued with all our might; and those that do not lead us there, we should disregard, as something of no value.” This is the criterion of Christian living.

A Christian continuously chooses whatever favours his salvation. We gain Paradise or lose it and end up in hell, in this lifetime. As St. John the Evangelist says: *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God* (John 3:18).

Consequently, the work of the church is not to “send” people to Paradise or to hell, but to prepare them for the final judgment. The work of the Clergy is therapeutic and not moralistic or character-shaping, in the temporal sense of the word. The essence of life in Christ is preserved in monasteries – naturally wherever they are Orthodox and of course patristic. The purpose of the Church’s offered therapy is not to create “useful” citizens and essentially “usable” ones, but citizens of the celestial (uncreated) kingdom. Such citizens are the Confessors and the Martyrs, the true faithful, the saints.

However, this is also the way that our mission is supervised: What are we inviting people to? **To the Church as a Hospital and a Therapy Center, or just an ideology that is labeled “Christian?”**

More often than not, we strive to secure a place in “Paradise,” **instead of striving to be healed.** That is why we focus on rituals and not on therapy. This of course does not signify a rejection of worship. But, without asceticism (spiritual exercise, ascetic lifestyle, act of therapy), worship cannot hallow us. The Grace that pours forth from it remains inert inside us. Orthodoxy doesn’t make any promises to send mankind to any sort of Paradise or hell; but it does have the power to prepare man, so that he may forever look upon the Uncreated Grace and the Kingdom of Christ as Paradise, and not as Hell.

Taken from “Orthodox-Christianity.com”

*[http://www.orthodox-christianity.com/2010/08/
paradise-and-hell-in-the-orthodox-tradition/](http://www.orthodox-christianity.com/2010/08/paradise-and-hell-in-the-orthodox-tradition/)*



THERE IS A STORY told of **St Philaret, the Metropolitan of Moscow** (1783-1867 A.D.), whether apocryphal or true, we do not know, though its teaching is true and echoes the teaching given in the piece above. The Saint was sitting at a luncheon when the lady opposite him asked him, how a merciful God could possibly create a hell. The Metropolitan, who was sitting in front of a window through which bright midday sunlight was streaming, asked the lady why she did not look him straight in the face when she addressed him. She explained that she could not, because the bright light was blinding her. He then explained that such was the Grace of God, which illumined those who had made themselves ready to receive it, but was a torment to those who had not.



TEACHING

OF THE VENERABLE SERAPHIM OF SAROV

ON THE PRAYER OF JESUS

OUR MIND, when through remembrance of God we close off all its pathways, necessarily demands that we occupy ourselves with that which is conducive to its activity. Thus it is only necessary to present it with the Lord Jesus, for it to have only this in view. For it is said, *No man can say Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit* (1 Cor. 12:3). But one must regard this saying as steadfast in one's innermost thoughts, lest it be turned into some kind of reverie. Because those, who are constantly occupied with this holy and glorious name in the depths of their hearts, might sometimes even behold illumination of their mind. It [the name], when thought of it is held through unremitting remembrance, can consume the very perceptible pollution, which exudes within the soul. For *our God is a consuming fire* (Heb. 12:29). Therefore the Lord calls the soul to great love of His glory. For, when its remembrance is long held in the mind in warmth of heart, this glorious and greatly desired name produces within us the ability to love His goodness without any kind of

impediment. And this is that pearl of great price, which each one may discover in giving up all that he possesses, and the finding of which causes one to rejoice with inexpressible joy (Diadochus).

The soul, after death, ascends through the air to the gates of heaven, and if it has Jesus with it, close to itself, it is not disgraced by its foes, and there, just as now, so also then at those gates it will respond to those enemies with boldness. Only if up until its very departure it does not tire of calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, both day and night, will Christ undoubtedly avenge it speedily, according to His own unfeigned and Divine promise, which He gave in connection with the unjust judge. Yea, I say unto you, I will avenge it both in this present life and after its departure from the body (Hesychius).

Let the remembrance of Jesus be wedded to your breathing, and then you will perceive the value of stillness (St John of the Ladder).

... to be continued in the next issue.



The Coming Month

THE HOLY AND GREAT LENT begins right in the middle of February this year, on Monday, 14th/27th. From now until Pascha, which this year falls on Sunday, 2nd/15th April, Orthodox Christians should try to the utmost to seek healing from their spiritual ills, through following the course of the fast, through confession, prayer and fasting. Oftentimes in contemporary society, this gets reduced to a bare minimum, perhaps just keeping the dietary prescriptions, but this on its own, though better than nothing, will not greatly help one.

The Church sets before us four Sundays in preparation for Lent (actually five, because Zacchæus Sunday also prepares us for Lent). These show us its true purpose: the ascent to the love of God, to which, of course, is joined love of our neighbour. But we also have to make preparations ourselves. The first task is to “clear the decks” of our life for

the fast, - and so make sure that you make space to attend as many of the special lenten services as possible, cut down on purely social activities, and only travel if it is absolutely necessary, so that you are grounded for the period, and thus able to devote more time to the spiritual. It is also advisable not to undertake any great changes in our life during this period, because that necessarily will bring disturbance and stress. By doing this you will be better able to keep the fast in a beneficial way, instead of just living your “normal” life, and adding a few religious observances.

The First Week, called **Clean Week**, is generally kept the most strictly, and in it we have the **Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete** on Compline on every evening from Monday to Friday. On Friday evening, we start the first of five lenten Friday evening chantings of the **Akathist Hymn** to the Mother of God, which culminate on the fifth Friday evening during the Mattins service for the **Saturday of the Laudation of the Theotokos**. But on the Saturday of Clean Week, we have the commemoration of the **Miracle of St Theodore the Recruit**, by which during a period of persecution under Julian the Apostate, he enabled the faithful to keep the fast, by instructing them to eat *koliva* - boiled wheat - when the foods in the markets had been defiled by being sprinkled with the blood of sacrifices offered to the idols by the pagan Emperor. This commemoration alone should show us the importance of keeping the food fast, although that, of course, should be augmented by fasting from the passions, by confession, increased prayer and spiritual reading, and by almsgiving.

The Week ends with the **Sunday of Orthodoxy** (20th February/ 4th March), on which, as with all the Sundays within Lent, we celebrate the Liturgy of St Basil the Great, rather than that of St John Chrysostom. This festival was inaugurated in A.D. 842, when the Empress Theodora and the Patriarch St Methodius, re-established the holy icons within the Great Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople, after a period of iconoclasm. So, initially it was a celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy over the heresy of the iconoclasts, but over the generations it has taken on a wider significance as the Triumph of Orthodoxy over all heresies.

Although its first celebration in the ninth century was led by the Empress and her son the Emperor Michael, who was then a minor, and

was a great state occasion, the Triumph of Orthodoxy is, of course, essentially an inner thing. It is celebrated in the churches of the Orthodox wherever “two or three” are gathered together, and so it is that it falls at the end of the week of the strictest fasting we have in the whole Church Year, when, though God’s mercy, the ministrations of the Church and our struggles, our hearts have been cleansed that we might better be able to perceive that triumph. Especially in our days, it appears that many who have a zeal for Orthodoxy, see its “triumph” in worldly power, in establishment, in organization, in numbers, in pomp and splendour. Others, a little more spiritually mature, perceive it in correctness, in strictness, in being right. But that triumph is more truly revealed in a heart that has been cleansed of all worldly attachments and which loves God. Because the Icon of the Mother of God was solemnly carried in procession into the Great Church in Constantinople on the original day of the feast, it is depicted centrally on the icon of the festival, surrounded by the Saints and those pious and Orthodox Christians who rejoiced in this restoration. But, without a doubt, we can see this depiction of the Mother of God, so prominently shown in the centre of the festal icon, as a call from the All-Pure One herself to that purity in which the love of God can abide, and of which she was the greatest exemplar.

After the Liturgy on this day, we have a **procession of the Icons around the Church**, with prayers for the spread of the true Faith and the recall of those who have erred or strayed, and in Cathedral Churches and the larger Monasteries they perform the **Rite of Orthodoxy**. Here, we simply read the Synodicon after Vespers on this day, which instructs us about the teachings of our Faith.



“AVARICE, or love of money, is the worship of idols, a daughter of unbelief, an excuse for infirmities, a foreboder of old age, a harbinger of drought, a herald of famines.”

VENERABLE JOHN OF THE LADDER, SIXTH CENTURY

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

“For some reason in asking prayers you make a distinction between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox, but then among the Orthodox you recently had two with un-Orthodox names, an Alfred and an Albert. Can you explain?”

- V.F., London W2.

WE DISTINGUISH between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox, because the former may be commemorated in the *proskomidi* of the Divine Liturgy, when the priest takes out particles of prosphora and places them on the diskos, below the Lamb and those particles commemorating the Saints. These particles are, at the end of the Liturgy, tipped into the Blood of Christ in the chalice, as a prayer is said for them. Those who are not Orthodox may not be commemorated in this way, because they are not participant in the sacramental life of the Church. Some have taken this to be a sign of a lack of love for those outside the Church, but it is quite the contrary. The Church’s ministry is a healing one. A good physician does not offer the same treatment to all his patients, but he prescribes what is appropriate for their various conditions, and even modifies that to take into consideration their general state of health, circumstances, etc. So the Church does not insensitively or crudely offer one cure for all. I think you would be surprised if you went to the doctor complaining of a sore throat and he suggested a hysterectomy! What may be a cure for one might well be damaging for another. Thus we remember the non-Orthodox in other prayers and in ways that the Holy Spirit, through the teachings of the Fathers, has instructed us, as being appropriate and helpful.

Regarding the question of names, strictly it is incorrect to say that there are Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christian names. The Russian Orthodox Church insists very strongly that one should only be named after a Saint. This is an admirable custom, and one which is undoubtedly the best to follow. Until recently, the Russians even published lists of acceptable names. These appear to have been drawn up in the nineteenth century, and the number of Saints included in them is somewhat limited. Now, however, many within the Russian Church are accepting a broader spectrum of Saints’ names, having come to know the Saints of the West, which hitherto were unknown to them. Our Saint Edward is a case in point. In fact the Albert you mentioned was recently baptized in a Russian Orthodox Church (not in our Synod), and was given this as his Orthodox name, being named for an early Irish saint.

Even in the Russian tradition there are anomalies though. Saint Vladimir's Christian name was Basil, and St Olga's Helen. Sts Boris and Gleb were baptized Roman and David, and so it is apparent that, even after their conversion, they continued to be known by their pre-Christian names (in fact of course, their pre-Christian names have thus been "baptized" and are now used as Orthodox names), and this is something which has happened again among converts to Orthodoxy in the West. One of our parishioners, who died last year, was given the Orthodox name Magdalena, yet was always known by her former name of Grace - one which had the priest at the time known, she could well have kept, as there are several Saints named Grace, though none included in the nineteenth century lists of acceptable names.

The Orthodox Serbs have a different local tradition. Each family has a patron Saint and they keep that saint's feast day as a family commemoration, their "Slava." The individual members of the family are not necessarily named after saints, although very often their names (when translated) reflect virtues.

The Orthodox Bulgarians have a custom of naming girls after flowers, and they celebrate on the Great Feast of the Creator of those flowers, the Lord's Entry into Jerusalem, Palm Sunday.

Although the Orthodox Greeks generally have Saints' names; they customarily named their babies after their grandparents, to honour them, and thus on occasion someone will not be given a Saint's name. Also they often use the "titles" of the Saviour, the Mother of God or the Saints as names, and so one has names such as "Lady," "Of the Portal," "Of the Myrtle Tree" (for icons of the Mother of God), Prodomos (Forerunner), Theologos, Chrysostomos, etc.

We have noticed also, among recent immigrants from former Iron Curtain countries, that they often have double names: one secular, one religious. Perhaps this custom took root in an attempt to live as Christians under the threat of persecution. One name could be used in the world, without drawing undue attention to themselves, and the other simply within the context of the Church.

Another thing that can happen is that there are variations of the name. Thus for instance, in Russian, you have both Ioann and Ivan for John, and in Britain we have even more variations: Jon, Ian, Iain, Iwan, Euan. Add to this other foreign variations and we have Yannis, Giovanni, Sean, Ifor, Hans, Ioannes, Johann, Jean, Juan and Vanni to name but a few, and then variations on these, and furthermore oftentimes feminine equivalents of them. We know of one little girl called Vanessa, named after St John the Hut-dweller.

The Alfred you mention was, in fact, an Orthodox Arab. The various Churches in the Arab world do not appear to insist rigorously on people being named after saints, although many are. Many also are named after virtues or Christian concepts. Also names introduced by the Crusaders seem to be popular among them. The man in question may have been given a Western name because of this, or it may be that, as some among the Orthodox do, his parents considered King Alfred the Great a saint. I simply do not know. I do remember, at Jordanville, being at the funeral of another Orthodox Alfred, a famous musicologist and convert to Orthodoxy, Alfred J. Swan.* Whether he was named after King Alfred, or given another name which had somehow been forgotten (he had become Orthodox in 1936 and died in 1970), the prayers were said for him under the name Alfred - which said within the Slavonic services and with Russian vowels sounded particularly strained.

One last thought about names, and this is simply my personal view - I have no mandate to set rules for the Church at large! - but it seems to me that an Orthodox Christian should at least in their family and church life, if not in their professional life, use their baptismal name. It must at the very least be a little confusing to go through life being constantly referred to and thinking of yourself as, say, Algernon, and then approaching the Chalice and hearing yourself being called Alexander.

**Footnote to Shepherd readers: For an appreciation of this remarkable man, whose work in helping children in the years immediately after the Russian Revolution is as worthy of remembrance as his contribution to the Russian musical tradition, visit the following link: <http://www.roca.org/OA/165/165e.htm>*



“THE LORD Himself says: *Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.* According to commentaries, the wisdom of the serpent consists of the fact that when a serpent is attacked, it first of all protects its head; similarly, in times of misfortune and difficult circumstances, the Christian must first of all protect his faith. Secondly the wisdom of the serpent consists of the fact that when it wants to shed its old skin, it slithers into a tight space, otherwise it will not be able to shed its skin. Likewise with the Christian, if he wishes to shed himself of the ‘old man,’ he must take the narrow path, according to the Gospel teaching. The harmlessness of the dove consists in gentleness and forgiveness of offenses, vexations and similar things.”

VENERABLE AMBROSE OF OPTINA, + 1891 A.D.

NEWS SECTION

BISHOP MURDERED

ACCORDING to “*Athens News*” (24/1/12): “An 83 year-old bishop who lived alone in the inner-city district of Agios Panteleimonas was found murdered in his home on 6th January. Bishop Eleftherios of Nyssa had been gagged with a handkerchief that police believe was used to choke him to death. There were no signs of a break-in or that anything had been taken, leading police to believe that the victim knew his assailant and the motives for the murder were personal. An investigation is underway.” **His Grace, Bishop Eleftherios**, who was living in retirement in Greece, had been an auxiliary Bishop in the **Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain** (Œcumenical Patriarchate), consecrated during the time when, in the 1980s, **His Eminence, Archbishop Methodios** had archpastoral oversight of the Archdiocese. May Bishop Eleftherios now find rest and the mercies of God.

SAIDNAYA CONVENT ATTACKED & A PRIEST KILLED IN SYRIA

THE ANCIENT CONVENT of Saidnaya in Syria was founded in A.D. 547, and is one of the holiest places in Syria, within the Patriarchate of Antioch. It is dedicated to the All-Holy Mother of God, and is the home of her wonder-working icon. It is resorted to by both Christians and Muslims, especially by women who are childless. Recently, during the unrest in Syria, Divine intervention prevented a shell that pierced the walls of the Convent from detonating. “The Virgin Mary stopped the shell from exploding with her own hands,” said **Mother Verone**, who interpreted the close call as a divine message that “God is watching over sacred places” amid the unprecedented unrest rocking Syria.

The Secretary General of the **Syrian Arab Red Crescent** and an Orthodox priest have been killed in violence that flared in parts of Syria on Wednesday, 25th January. The Red Crescent official, **Dr. Abd-al-Razzaq Jbeiro**, was shot and killed while traveling on the Halab-Damascus highway in a vehicle that was “clearly marked with the Red Crescent emblem,” according to a statement released by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The priest, from the Greek Orthodox Church, **Father Basilious Nasser**, was shot and killed on the

second day of heavy fighting in the city of Hama, while he was tending a injured person. The Syrian state news agency blamed an “armed terrorist group” for the killing, while opposition activists in Hama said the priest was shot by a government sniper.

EXTRAORDINARY AWARD

THE Palestinian leader, **Mahmoud Abbas**, a Sunni Muslim, was awarded the prize of the **International Fund for the Unity of the Orthodox Nations** on Saturday, 21st January at a ceremony at the **Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow**, led by **His Holiness, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia**. **Valery Alekseev**, who heads the IFUON, had this to say: “Mahmoud Abbas was picked from among other candidates for the award for being the guardian of Christian values in the Middle East. Mr. Abbas devotes a lot of his time to promoting the Christian-Islamic dialogue and encouraging Orthodox pilgrimages and the Orthodox presence on the Holy Land. In addition, he has been making a hefty personal contribution to a Palestinian settlement which is crucial for the stability in the Middle East and elsewhere.” A report further states: “Russia’s cultural and humanitarian cooperation with the Palestinian Authority has reached a new level thanks to Mahmoud Abbas. Since Mr. Abbas took office as Palestinian leader, a number of land plots and buildings which had been acquired by the Russian government in Jericho, Bethlehem and Bethany at the end of the 19th century, has been restituted the Russian Orthodox Church in Palestine. Under his leadership, a number of Russian cultural and spiritual centers and a Russian school for Palestinian children have been built. Mahmoud Abbas has fully delivered on his pledge to assist in reinstating the Russian presence in the Middle East. Palestinians see Russia as a political ally.” The very next day, *Interfax* reported that: “Mahmoud Abbas has expressed readiness to continue the return of property to the Russian Orthodox Church. ‘We believe that everything that used to belong to the Russian Orthodox Church in Palestinian territories should be returned to it. Our courts are now handling one or two cases. I am sure they will be decided in favor of the Russian Church,’ he said at a Saturday meeting with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia in Moscow.” That Mr. Abbas is promoting pilgrimages to Orthodox Christian sites is altogether excellent, though one suspects that it has more to do with giving Palestinians a higher profile in world affairs and in helping their economy (both admirable things, to be sure) than his being a “guardian of Christian values in the Middle East” - a rôle antithetical to his being a Muslim. It seems odd, that

if he is in some way a keeper of such values, he was able to assure the Moscow Patriarchate administration how the Courts in his authority would decide cases brought before them. And one wonders whether the emphasis on the restoration of properties, lands, and buildings to the Patriarchate and the Russian government has something to do with the award.



SIR-UK NEWS

CHRISTMAS AND THEOPHANY CELEBRATIONS

AT the Christmas Eve Vigil we were joined by a group of parishioners from **Christchurch Anglican parish in Woking town centre**, and on the day of the feast we had a packed church, with a number of non-Orthodox friends joining us, including **Councillor Glynis Preshaw**, who represents Brookwood on the Borough Council, and the cemetery owner, **Erkin Guney**. After the Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day, our Parish Breakfast was held in the **Brookwood Memorial Hall**, because our own hall could not accommodate everyone. We are particularly grateful to all of those of you who prepared foods for the feast, and those who helped to clear up afterwards - we did not incur the £50 penalty for leaving the hall in a bad state. When all had eaten well, **Joanna Rotherham** introduced the young people leading the carol signing, which was accompanied on keyboard, guitar and drums, and **Eugene Rotherham** particularly impressed everyone by his skill on the drums. We returned to Saint Edward's for Vespers, drawing a close to the day.

On the following day, a Sunday, the Synaxis of the Mother of God, **Mother Vikentia and the sisters at her Convent in Willesden** held their parish celebration. After the festal meal, members of the congregation and others treated us to a concert of carols and musical pieces. Among those participating we had **Christian Blackshaw**, an internationally known pianist who has family connections with the Convent, and nine-year-old **Anabella Amdur**, who sang several operatic pieces.

On the Theophany, as has become our "tradition," after the Divine Liturgy we travelled to Chertsey to bless the waters on the Abbey River, the site

of the seventh century monastery founded there by Saint Erkenwald, and where later many monks were martyred by the Danes. **Robin and Mary Haigh** again kindly offered us the use of their “quay side” by the river, and afterwards provided us with refreshments in the medieval barn which stands on their property. They had asked us, while there, to bless two rescue dogs which they had recently brought over from the United States. Apparently, neighbours got to hear of this, and in the event we had a line-up of nine dogs! As usual we were joined by a goodly number of neighbours and friends and people from the town. The whole event was given full page coverage in the *Surrey Herald*, with six colour pictures accompanying the article, and one superimposed on their front-page headline. We are extremely grateful to the Haighs for their kindness in not only opening their home for us in this way but also going to the trouble of preparing refreshments for everyone who came. God bless them!

FUNERAL OF NICHOLAS YELLACHICH

ON ST STEPHEN’S DAY, Monday, 27th December / 9th January, the funeral of **Nicholas Yellachich** was chanted at the **Russian Orthodox Church of the Dormition on Havard Road, London, W.4**. Nicholas had reposed on 1st January, n.s., at the age of 76. **Archpriest Vladimir Vilgerts** chanted the funeral service and also the service at the grave side in Saint Edward’s cemetery at Brookwood. Father Alexis, Father Economos Stephen Fretwell and his Presbytera, Joanna, and Father Niphon from the Brookwood community attended the funeral service, and **Archpriest Vadim Zakrevsky**, who had been the priest of the Harvard Road Church through the difficult period of the greater part of its construction, came from the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Ennismore Gardens. Near the end of the service in church, which was beautifully and reverently chanted, Father Vladimir paid a moving tribute to Nicholas, who had served as the Chairman of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral Building Committee. Under his leadership the Harvard Road Church had been built, and Fr Vladimir remarked that its blue dome would be a permanent memorial to him. At Brookwood, Nicholas was laid to rest next to his father and mother-in-law, **John and Nathalia Sowell**s, and after the interment, the family provided a Mercy Meal for the many people who had come in the hall of our Old Mortuary building, during which his son and daughter, **Dimitri and Natacha**, also paid personal tribute to their father’s memory. May his rest be with the Saints and his *Memory Eternal*, and may our Merciful Saviour grant comfort to his wife, **Tatiana**, and his family in their bereavement.

TWO BAPTISMS AT BROOKWOOD

ALEXANDRA, the infant daughter of **Georghe and Andrea Julia Grigoras, of Stanmore, London**, was baptized at St Edward's Church on 15th /28th January, the day of Sts Paul of Thebes and John the Hutdweller. The celebrant of the Mysterion was **Fr Ioan Onofrei**, who had come from Romania for the event, and Alexandra's godparents are **Claudia Gabriella Grigoras and Raluca Nica**. Her name Saint is the **Martyr Alexandra the Empress**, who is commemorated on 21st April /4th May in the Romanian usage. After the Baptism, family and friends enjoyed refreshments in the Old Mortuary hall. Fr Ioan had visited a few days earlier to see the church, and on the Sunday he celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the **Convent of the Annunciation**, fully in Romanian, for the Romanian Traditionalist Orthodox in this country, who packed the chapel.

His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methoni came to England to baptize **Alexander**, the infant son of **Marc and Catherine Lincoln of Swindon, Wiltshire**. We had planned that he should celebrate the Divine Liturgy here on the feast of Saint Efstymius the Great, 20th January / 2nd February, but in the event illness had stricken the Brotherhood and so the Bishop stayed in London and came only for the Baptism. Having asked us to meet him at the station, he nonetheless surprised us by taking advantage of the beautiful clear day, to walk through the cemetery and arrived unannounced. Alexander had been named after **St Alexander Nevsky**, and at the baptismal ceremony His Grace was assisted by **Fr Stephen Fretwell and Hierodeacon Sabbas**. Alexander's sponsors are **Michael and Cassiana Visanu, and Olga D'Amico**. After the Mysterion, the family again provided a celebratory meal in the Old Mortuary Hall, while the Bishop took the opportunity to meet and talk with the people present.

May the Lord God grant unto His newly-illuminated children, **Alexandra** and **Alexander**, that they grow in the Orthodox Faith, and ever remain steadfast. *Many Years* to them, and to their sponsors, and families.

A Silly Footnote: When, in conscience, we left the Russian Church Abroad as they submitted themselves to the Moscow Patriarchate, some gainsayers predicted that our community would wither away. However, in the 21 years under our former Bishop, we had 81 Baptisms at Brookwood, an average of nearly four a year. In the five years we have been under the spiritual omophorium of **His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian** we have had 37 Baptisms here, an average of between seven and eight a year. It seems we have even failed to wither! We are not much good at anything.

VISITORS TO SAINT EDWARD'S

THE **British Airways Walking Group** paid a brief and surprise visit to the Church on 10th January n.s., remarking how pleased they were to have seen it in its “Christmas glory.”

FREEWILL OFFERINGS

The average WEEKLY offerings in the alms box at the back of the church (which we have instead of the intrusion of taking collections) for the last six months of 2011 were as follows: July £416.79; August £307.33; September £274.46; October £238.69; November £343.79; and December £281.69. God's blessing be upon all who contributed in this and other ways.

BROOKWOOD CEMETERY SOCIETY

NOT REALLY SiR-UK news, but it happened here: On Wednesday 25th January, the BCS held their Winter Meeting in the Old Mortuary Hall of the Brotherhood, and well over thirty people attended. Because of the on-going contention in the Courts regarding the ownership of the major part of the cemetery, the Society chairman, **John Clarke**, explained the situation and its implications to the members present, who included our ward councillor, **Glynis Preshaw**. The general feeling of the meeting was that, as the Society would have to work with whoever the owner might be, as a Society they should not sign the petition that had been published, but would leave individual members free to do so. After a break and refreshments, during which members were able to socialize, Mr. Clarke gave a brief review of the recent developments and improvements in the cemetery and of those which it was intended to take. He also pointed out that the Cemetery has close links with two national commemorations this year, the centenary of the **sinking of the Titanic**, and the **Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen**. In the former case, there are people associated with the Titanic laid to rest in the Cemetery (**Sarah Eleanor Smith**, the widow of the captain and her daughter), and, for the Diamond Jubilee, the Royal Mail will be issuing stamps with portraits of the Monarchs of the present House of Windsor. Two of these portraits, of Edward VII and George V, are the work

of an artist, **Sir Luke Fildes**, at rest in the cemetery, and very near our Brotherhood, and a third, of George VI, is the work of his son, **Denis Quinton Fildes**.



PRACTICAL TIP

THIS MAY SEEM blindingly obvious, but it needs to be mentioned because, surprisingly, time and time again we find people who do not do it. **If you are going to attend a church service, check out when and where it is!** In recent weeks, we had someone turn up for an evening service, about an hour after it had finished. Even more recently some people came to a Liturgy here at Brookwood on a day when we did not have one, because we were celebrating the Liturgy at the Convent, as had been both advertised and announced. In fact, living in deepest Hertfordshire, they had travelled within a few miles of the Convent in order to get here. Several times a year, people will turn up thinking we should have a service when we do not, either because they follow the new calendar, or because our time schedule does not coincide with what they think they remember they did in some faraway home country. (Here, we are not thinking of the people who deliberately try to come to the last fifteen minutes of the Liturgy, and oftentimes meet us as we come out of church - they have their own reward!). If you want to go to a football match, or to see a film, or if you have a hospital appointment or one with the dentist, it seems that you can usually arrange to make a note of the time and place and arrive there in good order. The same should be done with regard to church services, and even more care should be exercised in this regard, because this relates to your inner spiritual life.



“GOD placed the yeast of desire for Christ into the dough of the human being, so that man, and with him all creation, should rise to Christ. For this reason all creation is essentially christcentric and is strongly drawn to Christ as its natural and eternal Centre and Goal” (cf. Rom. 8:19-23; Col. 1:16-17; Eph. 1:4-5).

VENERABLE JUSTIN OF CHELIJE, SERBIA, + 1979 A.D.