

The Shepherd

An Orthodox Christian Pastoral Magazine

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Christ is Risen ! Truly, He is Risen!

FROM THE FATHERS

"I BESEECH THEE, Christ my Spring, to make Thy source in my heart, so that the living stream of Thy water may gush out from me. Thou art the Spring from which life floweth and grace wellet forth, from which light poureth out on people of all nations. Those who drink of Thee, Christ, will be restored by the sweet flowing water, and will thirst no more; or rather they will still thirst, for those sated by the abundance of God's word are made to thirst the more by the sweetness they imbibe."

Saint Paulinus of Nola, late fourth/early fifth century

"MARY CAME [to the Tomb],' This is the name of Christ's Mother. Therefore, the one who hastened was a mother in name. She came as a woman, that Woman, who had become the mother of those who die, might become the mother of the living, and fulfilment might be had of the Scriptural statement about her: 'that is, the mother of the living' (Gen. 3:20)."

Saint Peter Chrysologus, + c. 450 A.D.

"YOU HAVE HEARD, beloved, how the holy women who had followed the Lord came to His tomb, bringing with them sweet spices, so that with tender affection they might tend Him in death Whom they had loved in life. And this tells us something which we should observe in the life of our holy Church. And it is important to give attention to what took place here; to see what we must do to imitate them. And we also, who believe in Him Who died, truly come with sweet spices to His tomb, when we come seeking the Lord, bringing with us the sweet odour of virtue, and the credit of good works."

Saint Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, + 604 A.D.

BLESSED MATRONA

Matrona Dmitrievna Nikonova, 1885 -1952

Commemoration Date: 2nd May

IN 1885, in the village of Seben, which lies in the Epiphany region of the Tula province, into a poor peasant family, a blind girl was born and given at her Baptism the name Matrona (after the Venerable Matrona, whose memory is celebrated on 9th/22nd November).

Her parents, Dmitry and Natalia Nikonov, already had three children (two sons and a daughter), and in such hardship, when they had to heat their stove with straw, this fourth child was first of all another mouth to feed. That's why, even before the birth of the unwanted child, her mother decided to get rid of her. Of course in a patriarchal peasant environment, one couldn't even think about the murder of a child in its mother's womb. But there were a lot of orphanages, where poor children, and those born out of wedlock, were brought up at the state's expense or with the help of charitable people. Natalia Nikonova decided to send her child to one such orphanage in the nearby village. But before giving birth she had some kind of warning: the unborn daughter appeared to her in a dream, as a vision of a bird with a human face and its eyes shut. The God-fearing woman took it as a sign and gave up all thoughts of sending her to an orphanage. She decided she would love and care for her "poor child."

Amazing things are told about the Baptism of Matrona. According to witnesses, a wonderful fragrance filled the church when the child was submerged in the water, and one person even saw a pillar of scented smoke that rose above the font. The priest of that village, Fr Vasily, who baptised the girl (he was considered a pious and blessed man by laymen) declared in front of all the people that the child Matrona was a saint chosen by God. There was a sign of the girl's chest - a growth in the form of a cross.

Matrona wasn't just blind - she did not have any eyes at all. Of course, such a child could not take part in children's games. They called her "blind" and even humiliated her; they beat her with nettles, and they put her in a deep pit and with a cruel curiosity watched her trying to get out. That is why, from an early age, Matrona stopped coming out of her house at all.

From her early years, Matrona instead strove for holy, heavenly things. At night, while her parents slept, she would go to the icon corner and somehow take the icons off the shelf and put them on the table, and "play" with them in solitude. It seems that even then she found consolation in spiritual talks with angels and saints.

Matrona grew up in church; at first with her mother, and then on her own, she went to Divine services whenever possible. When her mother didn't know where her daughter was, she always found her in church.

For the Church of the Dormition, Matrona (who had already become well-known: her request was like a blessing) asked for an icon of the Mother of God "Recovery of the Dead" to be painted. This icon became wonderworking and was the greatest local sacred thing. Matrona insisted that the iconographer have confession and Holy Communion before he started his work.

All her life, the Blessed Matrona was surrounded by icons. In her room, where she stayed the longest (eight years) there were three icon corners (from top to bottom) with burning lampadas in front of them. Her love for icons was amazing. Without eyes no doubt she saw them with spiritual vision.

At the same time, Matrona had a normal understanding of the world around her. To a pitiful exclamation of her close friend: "What a shame that you cannot see the beauty of the world!" - she replied: "The Lord once opened my eyes and showed me the world and His creation. I saw the sun and the stars in the sky and everything on earth, all its beauty: mountains, rivers, grass, flowers, birds..." Another amazing thing

described by the same person (Z. V. Zhdanova) is that the uneducated, blind Matrona helped her prepare a project on architecture for her diploma, describing Italian Renaissance palaces.

By the time Matrona was seven years of age people started noticing that the girl had special talents. For example, she knew not only the secret sins and crimes of others, but also their thoughts. She could foresee danger and calamities. Through her prayers people received consolation in their grief and healing of their infirmities. Many people started visiting Matrona. Wishing to thank her, people brought Matrona food and other presents. Thus she was not a burden for her family but rather its main provider.

Matrona was blessed to meet Saint John of Cronstadt, who in front of everyone called her "the eighth pillar of Russia" (Matrona was then only 14 years old).

Some time passed and the Lord, Who grants His elect sorrows, deprived Matrona of her greatest consolation, namely that of attending Divine services. At the age of seventeen she all of a sudden stopped being able to walk. Nobody knew what kind of disease it was. Matrona had a spiritual explanation for it. But she never walked again.

Meanwhile the difficulties predicted by Matrona began. Many landowners witnessed their property being robbed, and they were turned into homeless beggars. The dividing up of the land began, and was followed by famine. Many peasants left their villages and tried to settle in towns where it was easier to find a job, primarily in Moscow.

In 1925, at the age of forty, Matrona also moved to Moscow, staying with various friends and relatives. She didn't have a *propiska* (license to live in Moscow), and it was therefore by a miracle that she escaped arrest. Very often she had to leave the place where she was staying in haste, just before the arrival of the militia, thus saving not only herself but the owners of the flat as well.

Her life seemed to be quite monotonous: during the day-time she accepted visitors (about forty people a day) - she practically never stayed on her own, - and at night she prayed. Matrona never went to sleep; she only dozed lying on her side.

How do people remember Matrona? She was small like a child, with small arms and legs. She sat with legs crossed on a bed or on a chest. She had fluffy hair with a straight parting. Eyes shut tight... A kind, bright face ... Gentle voice... She comforted the sick and those in sorrow, stroked their heads, crossed them, cheered them up, sometimes joked, but at other times strictly condemned things and instructed them. She gave them to drink water blessed with her prayers.

She taught not to judge one's neighbour, but to see one's own sins, to give oneself fully to God's will, to pray unceasingly, to live with prayer, to cross oneself and surrounding objects often, thus protecting oneself from evil. One should partake of Holy Communion frequently; love and help the old and sick; have reverent attention at the Divine services; not pay attention to one's dreams; not look for "elders" and "healers." Those who were searching for spiritual perfection she taught not to stand out from others (with black clothes and the like). She taught long suffering.

During demonstrations, she wouldn't leave the house or even open the window. She could see the spiritual side of what was happening. When excited mobs with red flags and portraits of their leaders (in a mocking version of the procession with the cross) roamed Moscow, with revolutionary songs and Party slogans, demons filled the air and got into peoples' houses. Matrona used allegory to remind people about the closeness of the evil spirits and the importance of keeping the "windows of the soul" closed to them.

Generally one could see the traits of a fool-for-Christ in Matrona's actions and words. How else could one explain her strange "game with dolls"? And it was surely not without reason that she gave nicknames to her carers, calling women men's names (Siomka, Pejtka, Vanjka). To the question of how to save oneself, she would reply: "All hold on to my heel -and you will be saved." She also hid with jokes her gift of foreseeing events. She was calm and confident, and never doubted God's power when she prayed for those who were possessed.

Matrona died on 2nd May in Skhodnja and was buried according to her will in the Danilov cemetery "to be able to hear services" (there was a church there). Some thirty years later, her grave became a holy place, where many believers came from all parts of Russia.

Translated by Mrs Valentina B. Merritt of Brookwood

Adapted from
**"THE HOUSE OF GOD
AND THE CHURCH SERVICES"**

By the Priest N. R. Antonov

Continuation

§ The depictions of the Saviour and the Mother of God in the Catacombs. In depicting events from the lives of the Saviour and the Mother of God, Christian artists stopped short of using self-expression in their depictions of the foremost sacred personages of the Christian Faith, the Saviour and the Mother of God. The sacred depictions of the Saviour rather fell into three types: 1) symbolical depictions; 2) depictions in classical style, and 3) in Byzantine style. The Byzantine style is widely employed to this day. We have spoken concerning the symbolical works above, mentioning the depictions of the Good Shepherd, the Lamb and of Orpheus, as a kind of figure of Jesus Christ. The second type, the classical one, depicts the Saviour in his younger years, beardless, sometimes with long and sometimes with short hair, in a cloak, with a staff in His hand or sometimes, as a sign that He is a teacher, with a scroll, the face delineated with delicate lines, and with a well-proportioned physique. One comes across this type until the fourth century, and thereafter the Byzantine style takes over. The marks of the Byzantine style are that the face of the Saviour is stern and has an expressive character; His hair is always long and parted in the middle; He has a beard, sometimes divided into two. A halo or nimbus adorns the Saviour's head.

The depiction of the Mother of God (often done on the walls and arches of the catacombs, and even more often found on glass vessels) are like those of the Saviour in that at the beginning they were almost all of the classical type, and thereafter, from

the fifth to sixth centuries onwards, the Byzantine style gained ascendancy. In the classical style, the Mother of God is presented seated, with her head covered, and in the customary dress of a Roman matron; the expression of her face is modest, its lines are proper and classical, her expression is somewhat thoughtful and concentrated. In her arms, the Child is depicted, naked, with His face turned back towards the viewer. Sometimes the Mother of God was portrayed with her head veiled, with a necklace about her neck and in a splendid gown.

In depictions of the Byzantine type, the Mother of God is portrayed with the following distinguishing marks: the stern and majestic beauty of her face; the lines of the face are economical, her eyes large, her nose straight, her chin sufficiently large, and her lips finely outlined. The great economy in all the lines of the depiction is to be noted. On her head, the Theotokos has the usual veil, marked with (three) stars or crosses. To the side there is the inscription "MR ThU" (in Greek letters - the first and last letters of the words "Mother" and "of God"). The distinct lines and the generally impressive colouring distinguish the Byzantine style.

§ The General Significance of the Iconographic Art Found in the Catacombs. The sacred depictions found in the Catacombs from the greatest antiquity tell us through the visual arts that: 1) the Christian faith does not suppress or demean the desire and the artistic talent which strives to give expression to Christian truths or living Christian personages by means of paints and other mediums; 2) the tradition of having icons at services and of reverencing them has been hallowed by the example of those, the very best Christians: the holy martyrs and confessors; and 3) our Orthodox Church allows greater scope, than do the other Christian confessions, to man's religious expression, because in her services to the Lord she dedicates all the different arts: poetry, singing, architecture, and now lastly the visual arts.

We are omitting two long sections on "Greek" and "Russian" iconography, which are far better dealt with in other source books.

§ The Morally Instructive Meaning of the Icons. The holy icons have been used in Church from the earliest times because of their great didactic significance. In a good and lively way they remind those praying of the persons depicted, and they call those at prayer to emulate their deeds and follow their words and instructions. Just as a normal picture reminds people of the likeness of a close one or of someone famous, and by looking at them consciousness of their likeness is involuntarily roused in their minds, so faithful Christians, through the iconographic depictions of the Lord and His saints, thereby have their holy life made alive in their minds and hearts. In conjunction with the artistic depiction of the Saviour in icons. His depiction in the written text in the Gospels is able to grant us a more lively and graphic remembrance of Him. The icons are blessed with holy water and through the appointed prayers.

To be continued with "The Depiction and Veneration of the Holy Cross"...

**THE SPIRITUAL HERITAGE OF
FATHER GEORGE CHEREMETIEFF**
Thoughts on a Journey
Thoughts on the Parable of Those Invited to the Supper

IN THIS PARABLE, Christ said that the kingdom of Heaven is like a King who made a feast for his son. When everything was ready, he sent his servants to call those invited to the feast. But, for various reasons, those invited asked to be excused: one had to work in his fields, one had trade, and another married. Then the King sent his servants to invite all those who wished to come, and thus the feast was furnished with guests. But when the king entered he saw among those reclining at table a man not wearing a wedding garment, and he asked him why he had come to the feast like that. The man was silent. And the King ordered that they throw him out into the outer darkness....

So, when we consider how this parable might relate to us, we start feeling awkward. Christ took pity on mankind who had fallen. He left the most radiant Paradise and came down to earth, so that by His sufferings and death He might expiate men's sins and grant them not only the possibility of a future life, but even here and now that they might live in the spirit beyond the reach of the laws of the physical world and its evils. For this reason He founded His church, promising that the powers of hades and of evil would not prevail against Her. He provided her with the Mysteries, which cleanse and elevate us, and unite our spirit with God, the Fountain of love and of all life.

Thus it is that the preachers invite us to the Mystical Supper. The priests celebrate the Divine Liturgy and invite us to taste of the Heavenly Bread. But we do not want to. Like those invited we are too lazy to give up our day-to-day affairs and our usual entertainments; we are too lazy to give up our daily cares and our night-time pleasures, and to prepare our souls by prayer and fasting. And so we do not approach the Holy Chalice.

Yet others do decide to approach it, but do so without purification, without labour, without repentance, coming straight from work or from a party. Thus they approach Holy Communion with their soul attired in a garment that is not a wedding one and is soiled. This is because they come to the Mysterion of confession indifferently, with a kind of "Well, I'm sinful, father," and that's it - not a thought, nor any sorrow. And the Mysterion does not enlighten or heal such a soul, but it is taken unto condemnation and unto physical and spiritual illness.

The man who came to the wedding feast without a wedding garment was cast out, not because he was poor, and did not have any wedding clothes, as many lightmindedly think. Wedding clothes can be simple, but out of respect for one's host they should be clean. That man was too lazy to clean his wedding garment, and bring it to an appropriate state for such an event, and it was because of his slothfulness and carelessness that he was thrown out.

And in our case, the soul which is not spiritually cleansed, which is not appropriately garbed, dares to approach the most immaculate Mystery. And likewise it is cast out to the place where those are who voluntarily did not come to the feast, those whose preference was for that which does not save, for materialistic sciences and for impure earthly pleasures. They preferred these things to the pure spiritual water of life.

Those who love mud are thrown into mud. And when after crossing the border of this earthly life, they at last come to understand that it is disgusting mud and

become horrified, then it is too late to return and to cleanse themselves. And then indeed there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Only then will they understand the vanity of everything material, and the filthiness of their crazed desires and pleasures. Only then will they realise that after earthly death it is impossible to return to that which is pure and holy, to love and compassion. Then they will desire these things with their whole soul, but will not be able to attain them.

Oh, if only we could understand this in time!

*This ends the extracts from
Fr George Cheremetieff's Spiritual Heritage
Translation by Mrs V. B. Merritt*

BOOK REVIEW

Genesis, Creation and Early Man

The Orthodox Christian Vision Fr. Seraphim Rose

Published by Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood,
Platina, California 2000

Softback, 710 pgs; ISBN 1-887904-02-6; \$24.00 US/£17.50

THIS IS A PROFOUND and comprehensive volume which patently seeks to be sincere and honest in its approach to the creation/evolution debate, a task in which for the most part it succeeds admirably, although occasionally an element of intolerance and dogmatism does tend to creep in.

Fr Seraphim Rose points out that there is no scientific proof for either creation or evolution. On theological grounds he believes in creation, and sets forth clearly the Orthodox Faith regarding the Creation, the nature and the Fall of man, the Redemption and the final Transfiguration of the cosmos, in the light of Scriptural revelation and the teaching of the Fathers of the Church.

Throughout the book, great emphasis is laid on the fact that while genuine scientific truth will never contradict revealed Truth. It is of the utmost importance to distinguish between scientific facts and a particular interpretation of those facts based on a specific scientific theory of how all things came to exist, since here we are not in the realm of scientific fact but of philosophical speculation. In the scientific theory of biological evolutionism we have a philosophy which is in complete contradiction to Christianity, affirming as it does that everything we see in the natural world is the result of purely materialistic and mechanical forces, with new species of creatures gradually evolving out of existing ones over millions of years by chance mutations, natural selection and the survival of the fittest techniques. It is made clear that variety and development within a species is not to be confused with evolution, where a new species is said to evolve out of another species.

Fr Seraphim Rose's statement that evolution can neither be proved nor disproved with our present state of scientific knowledge is openly and readily acknowledged by many eminent scientists, who agree that the scientific facts available can be interpreted quite differently according to one's philosophical assumptions. And since creationists, atheistic, deistic and Christian evolutionists are all to be found

among the ranks of both scientists and non-scientists, the issue is not just a simple one between "fundamentalist creationists" on the one hand and "scientific evolutionists" on the other, as is usually thought.

The many delightful black and white illustrations chosen to accompany the text are a joy in themselves and well suited to their purpose. The first part of the book - "An Orthodox Patristic Commentary on Genesis" - is arguably the best section, being very detailed and instructive with an impressive array of deeply illuminating quotations from the Fathers. The second part deals with "The Philosophy of Evolution." Based on the teachings of the Fathers, Fr Seraphim firmly rejects both atheistic and Christian evolution, which see Adam - Man - not as the direct and special creation of God, but as an "evolved beast," the physical offspring, either by chance or by Divine guidance, of non-human creatures, with death and decay already established on the earth before the appearance of Man. He pursues the links between the philosophy of evolution, the pseudo-mysticism of de Chardin, and the coming Anti-Christ and Anti (False) Christianity thoroughly and convincingly.

The sections put together from selections by the editor are rather less helpful, tending to be repetitive, or coming across as "bitty" or obscure, as in the Radiometric dating section with its use of technical terms unlikely to be familiar to most readers.

There is also perhaps a rather irritating over emphasis on the question concerning the length of the "days" of creation. It might have been preferable just to have treated this subject with a lighter hand and a greater caution and diffidence, since Scripture and reason alike tell us that Creation is a mystery completely beyond the sphere of human experience, and that all our views of God's creation must be partial and imperfect. As the work of the Creator in space was not limited to the tiny terrestrial globe we inhabit, there is no reason why it should have been restricted in time to the purely terrestrial limits of day and night which exist only relative to us. The knowledge of creation revealed to Moses under Divine inspiration and recorded in simple language bearing the stamp of authority, should lead us to an awed contemplation of the mystery of Creation, but it will not satisfy any curiosity as to the manner in which God's works were accomplished. It is simply impossible for us to know what kind of "Days" these were. The book, in fact, does say this, but in a roundabout and laboured way.

A related point, also dealt with, concerns the age of the earth -thousands or billions of years. Fr Seraphim points out that the Fathers never insisted on any exact figure, based literally on the genealogies in Genesis, and that the Septuagint differs from the Hebrew text. He does not mention a Samaritan text which differs again. A consideration of other possibilities on this point might have been welcome: that the use of plural names in the genealogies may denote families rather than individuals, and that it is possible that the genealogies were restricted to persons of note and may therefore admit of large intervals. Other ancient nations had their own ways of calculating years, differing from the Hebrews, some possessing traditions that go further back than the Genesis chronology. We do not know if Moses received the genealogies as passed down by patriarchal tradition, or as one educated in Pharaoh's court he may have researched ancient documents and monuments for his purpose. At any rate, we cannot use the genealogies to calculate the exact time of man's existence on earth, and probably they were never intended to be so used. Having said that, it

must be noted, as Fr Seraphim points out, that all the ancient civilisations agreed that the age of the earth was to be numbered in thousands rather than in billions of years.

As regards the advanced age to which the early men lived according to Genesis, there is, in fact, a large amount of independent tradition to the effect that life extended to at least several hundred years - the Indians spoke of 400, the Greeks and Romans 800 years, while others even inflated this to thousands of years.

There is much food for thought in the book, but unless one is a compulsive reader who feels compelled to read a book from cover to cover, it would probably be best to select what is helpful and of interest and leave the rest. The book can be considered essential reading for those who wish to discover the mind of the Fathers on creation, or are simply looking for an introduction to the creation / evolution debate, and it will be of great encouragement to anyone feeling confused or perplexed, and whose faith has perhaps faltered under the persistent pressure of the current barrage of scientific theories parading as fact, and the constant denigration of traditional Christianity.

*Contributed by Mrs Miriam Lambouras
of Broadstairs, Kent*

NEWS SECTION

PALESTINE

THE CRISIS IN THE HOLY LAND has been very widely reported in the press. Various Church leaders have called for an end to the bloodshed and that peaceful solutions should be sought, and although these statements have not been given the prominence they deserve and have not been heeded, they have received brief mention in the secular reports. The Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Zakynthos, Chrysostomos, rejected an invitation to attend a formal event celebrating the 54th anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel in his sympathy for the plight of the Palestinian people. More heart-rending are some of the personal testimonies that have reached us from fellow Christians suffering there. A gynaecological clinic in Bethlehem run by an Orthodox couple, both doctors, was broken into by Israeli soldiers and everything wantonly destroyed. They even defecated on the floor and riddled the walls with bullets. A young Christian Arab woman and her year-old baby shot dead. A Russian relative of one of our nuns narrowly escaped being the victim of a Palestinian suicide-bomber when shopping. A pilgrim hospice owned by the Moscow Patriarchate was taken over by Israeli soldiers, and this called forth a strong protest from Patriarch Aleksii himself. For some time now Christians in Ramallah have been prevented from visiting the holy places in nearby Jerusalem; now they, both Orthodox and Roman Catholics, are unable to attend services even in their parish churches. Dr Simon Araj, chairman of the Arab Orthodox Benevolent Society in Beit Jala, reports that his own house had been shelled several times. He tells of neighbours who have been killed and wounded. He states that he is not involved in politics and believes in coexistence of all denominations (Christianity, Judaism and Islam). He is trying to organise food parcels for all the people under siege in Bethlehem. Through internet postings, e-mails and press cuttings, we have scores of evidences of the terrible plight of the people in the Holy Land, of the most deplorable brutality, but also of instances

of people, even in such conditions, trying to help others, showing love and concern for others even across the confessional divides. Observers in the West may have been confused seeing press reports that give the impression that the Church of the Nativity belongs to Roman Catholic Franciscans; and the situation there has indeed caused a measure of denominational conflict. Orthodox spokesmen object that among the Palestinians given sanctuary in the Church, there were gunmen who were not first required to lay down their arms. It was the RC clerics who allowed this defilement of the holy place, and they seem to have thereafter taken the initiative in dealing with the media. The Orthodox, including the ruling hierarch, Metropolitan Ambrosios, have raised objections to this turn of events. A Greek Orthodox spokesman said: "The Patriarch (Eirenaios) is doing all he can and is working with dignity, with patience and without offending anyone. He is prudent. The Orthodox community is squarely behind him... We Orthodox may not be in the media like the Catholics, but I think that we are handling the situation better. We are Easterners, and the Westerners do not know the mentality of the East as we do. We know how to live with the Muslims as we have for centuries." Reports have also reached us that sacred objects in the Church of the Nativity have been vandalised by the militiamen who have taken refuge there. Because of the presence of our Convent in London, where the sisters are Palestinian Christians whose close blood-relatives are living in Ramallah and in the midst of the terror, the brutal offensive against the Palestinians is naturally of the greatest concern to us. We ask the prayers of the faithful for all those involved, even for those who are brutally oppressing others. In speaking of the summary "execution" of five Palestinian officers near Arafat's compound in Ramallah, a Greek American correspondent married to a Palestinian Christian, Maria Khoury, pleads: "They (the shot officers) are someone's father. They are someone's brother. They are someone's husband. Hate and revenge continue." But the same is true of the Israeli "executioners." Someone has a father, a brother, a son, a friend, who has been brutalised by the present conflict. They also need our prayers. They will not have the consolation that their loved ones died unjustly and have therefore found mercy. They and their loved ones are still alive and, when times are quieter, will live on with the knowledge of their terrible crimes. We also urge our readers to send alms to help the plight of the victims of this war.

SERBIA

HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH PAVLE of Serbia and the Bishops of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church have issued a protest to world leaders about the behaviour of SFOR soldiers. The soldiers, in their search for Radovan Karadzic used violence and explosives to break into homes, schools and clinics in the villages of Celebic, Borja and Hoceva. They forced their way into the Church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God in Celebic carrying weapons. They scattered the sacred objects on the Holy Table and damaged the sacred vessels. The Patriarch and his hierarchs appealed for the necessary measures to be taken that such sacrilegious events should not be repeated.

In an interview, Fr Sava of Dechani monastery reported that in the Pec area, Christian cemeteries have been violated by Albanian extremists, where not only have monuments been removed or destroyed, but coffins have been broken into and the bones of the deceased scattered. He also spoke of the attempt to wipe out the historical and spiritual heritage of the Serbs in Kosovo, both by destroying monuments

and by falsifying history. He complained that the pro-Albanian Roman Catholic Bishop of Prizren, Marko Sopi, had been helping in this work of disinformation, claiming that some of the most ancient Orthodox monasteries had been Roman Catholic. Apparently Bishop Sopi's comments and his extreme pro-Albanian stance have even upset his Croatian fellow-religionists. Fr Sava refused to be cast down by the situation in his homeland, saying: "For us, Orthodox Christians, suffering is not only a punishment but, first and foremost, a blessing from God and an invitation to repentance and turning to God." And he ends: "The war against the dead especially represents the most morbid dimension of the hate which reigns in this region. Nevertheless, despite everything, in our prayers we never fail to mention those who in their ignorance and blindness commit such acts, praying with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: 'Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.'"

METROPOLITAN THEODOSIUS TO RETIRE

A PRESS RELEASE from Syosset, N.Y., informs us that the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America (the former American Metropolia of the Russian Church), Metropolitan Theodosius, is to retire because of his health problems. Metropolitan Theodosius is 69 and has recently taken a four-month medical leave as a result of a series of strokes. On April 2nd, the OCA Synod accepted his request to retire and thanked him for his service. The retirement will become formal at the Church's All-American Council scheduled for 21st July in Orlando, Florida. At that gathering, 600 clergy and lay delegates will elect his successor, and submit their choice to the Bishops' Synod for their ratification.

PATRIARCH DAMPENS HOPES OF INDEPENDENCE

HIS ALL-HOLINESS, the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomeos I, spoke at a dinner hosted by Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America in Washington, D.C., on 4th March this year. He took the opportunity to state his opinion that the GOA was not yet mature enough for the autonomy, which is being sought for it. A release from "Today's News" says: "According to reports the Patriarch said that although dynamic and capable of great accomplishments the GOA is not mature enough or ready to go on its own and still is in need of the guidance, experience and history of the Mother Church."

WCC LEADERS VISIT GREECE

REV. DR KONRAD RAISER, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, led a delegation to Greece in March. They were received in audience by His Beatitude Archbishop Christodoulos, the Archbishop of Athens, and several leading hierarchs of the Church of Greece. Reports indicate that the Greek hierarchs expressed interest in closer collaboration with the WCC with regard to matters of common concern. From the reports that have reached us, these matters seem to be largely secular: globalization, resolution of conflicts, escaping a culture of "egotistic self-sufficiency," and the like. Nothing seems to have been said on matters of Faith. However, on his return to Geneva, Dr Raiser offered a positive assessment of the visit, and "noted a new spirit of openness for ecumenical collaboration." One wonders whether he heard what he wanted to hear, and not what was said! However, sadly the

Greek church leaders have apparently "clearly affirmed their will to continue active participation in the WCC."

ATHENS - ROME LINKS

THE VATICAN PRESS OFFICE has published a letter sent by Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens to Pope John Paul II, stating that he "wishes to create a bridge of communication, reconciliation and confidence between us in the European Union, so that our Christian witness will be more intense, more credible and more effective in a society that is on the verge of losing the traditional values of faith in Christ the Redeemer." The Pope received a delegation bearing this message on 11th March. The letter continues: "Without denying the dogmatic and doctrinal realities that separate us and create obstacles to our common prayer and our communion we, despite the foregoing, are ready to collaborate together in the social, cultural, educational, ecological and bioethical fields for the good of humanity." It seems, then that this approach very much reflected that made to the WCC delegation.

ROME - RUSSIA RELATIONS

RELATIONS between the Moscow Patriarchate and Rome seem still to be strained. The creation of R.C. dioceses in Russia, what the Orthodox consider proselytising, and disputes over properties appear to be at the root of these difficulties, although the Patriarch of Moscow has now stated that he is now willing to meet the Pope if these matters could be solved during the encounter.

About 80 Orthodox believers in Pskov protested against the building of a Roman Catholic church in the city. They took to the streets carrying placards reading "Holy Russia, keep the Orthodox faith," and "He who lives by the sword will die by the sword" - a reference to the militant methods used by the RCs in the past to enforce conversions from Orthodoxy. The protesters held a short service at the site of the proposed church. For their part the Catholic leaders explained that they were only thinking of building because the previous RC church, which had been built in freer pre-revolutionary times, had not been returned to them and was being used as an education centre.

VISIT OF THE MIRACULOUS KURSK ROOT ICON

READERS will be aware from previous issues of the itinerary of the Icon through Britain and Ireland. After being at the London Russian Orthodox Church for a week and reposing at the Annunciation Convent during the first days of the Great Fast, the Icon was taken to Ireland, to the communities in Dublin, Stradbally and Belfast. On its return to Britain, Fr Peter took the Icon to Fr Paul Elliott and the Saint Elizabeth Mission in Birkenhead and, next day, to the Saint Werburgh Mission in Congleton, where the service was held in their Sts Constantine & Helen chapel at Eaton. It was greeted by about seventy of the faithful, Russians, Greeks,

Romanians, English and an Arab, at Bradford in the St Nicolas Chapel, where a Moleben was chanted with the Akathist. Frs Alexis and Sabbas then journeyed with the Icon to East Anglia, where overnight they enjoyed the hospitality of Andrew and Maria Bond. That afternoon, the Icon was taken to Sts Felix and Edmund Mission in Felixstowe, where Fr Andrew Phillips and his parishioners were joined by Orthodox

from other parishes in the area. Fr Alexander Haig and faithful from St Helen's in Colchester were among the many present. Throughout the afternoon Molebens and Akathists were chanted before the Icon, and refreshments provided for the participants. Afterwards the Icon was taken to the sick and to the homes of some of the parishioners. The next day the Icon was taken to Saint Boniface Mission in Ryde, where again we were joined by Orthodox from other parishes in Portsmouth and Chichester. The Icon was then brought to Brookwood for the Friday evening Akathist service and for Divine Liturgy on the second Saturday of the fast. The Sunday was the feast of the Martyrdom of Saint Edward, and the Sacred Relics were placed by the Icon for the Vigil. For the Divine Liturgy on our feastday, we were joined by Fr Peter Baulk from Boreham Wood and Fr Deacon Andrey Sikojev, who serves in the Holy Virgin Protection Parish in Berlin, and had arrived in England to accompany the Icon back to Germany. After the Liturgy, the Lesser Blessing of the Waters was celebrated before the Icon and the Relics, and then both these sacred things were taken in procession to the site where we hope to build the new monastic residence and prayers were said there to bless the endeavour, and to help us overcome the difficulties we are experiencing. On our return to the church, the procession was halted while Laurence Bloom-Davis placed a wreath on the grave of John Wilson Claridge, who in 1984 donated the Sacred Relics of St Edward to our community and who himself is now interred by the entrance to the church. Again our congregation was swollen by pilgrims from other parishes and was probably the biggest that we have ever had in our twenty years at St Edward's. Mrs Elena Holden did a splendid job in managing to provide food for everyone at the buffet breakfast afterwards. Miss Irena Uderska provided an abundance of English wine, and Mrs Annie Shaw ably managed distribution. The last service before the icon in Britain was at the Harvard Road Church, a Moleben and Akathist on Sunday evening. As Fr Vadim had unexpectedly to be away, Fr Alexis was deputed to serve it, assisted by Fr Deacon Andrey, Fr Hierodeacon Sabbas and Fr Deacon Sergei Zashchittin. Fr Maxim Nikolsky from the Patriarchal Church and many others from other churches again joined us. Fr Andrey had his flight to catch, and at the end we experienced some difficulty in carrying the icon through the mass of people, trying for the last time to venerate it. During the Icon's period in this country, it was taken to several infirm persons, and it was heartening to see that many disabled people turned up at the services all over the country, asking the Virgin's aid in their infirmities. May the grace of her Icon remain with us and sustain us

APOLOGIES

IN OUR APRIL ISSUE, we introduced the hitherto unknown word "icquz" on page 5, line 13. In fact we were trying to be clever and reproduce the Greek word for fish in Greek letters. This new-fangled contraption appeared to be happy with our efforts, but was apparently unprepared to see this through to the spool and onto the printed page. Forgive us, we shall have to take a humbler course in future until we are more adept with the new technology.

PRACTICAL TIP

BE AT LEAST as careful with your church commitments as you are with family, social and business ones. In the past few weeks, in our relatively small mission, we have had to answer the following comments from people coming to church: - 1) on a

feast day when we had had a Vigil service, from someone who had arrived early for the Divine Liturgy: "Aren't we going to have Mattins this morning?" 2) from someone who turned up at the end of Vespers, "I was expecting it to start at seven o'clock not six!" 3) to someone who arrived about ten minutes before the Akathist service on the fifth Friday evening in Great Lent was about to begin: "Are you having a service tonight?" 4) a lady phoned towards the end of Lent expecting us to be keeping our non-lenten service schedule. Now, if you had a business meeting, a dental appointment, or if you were going to see a film or a football match, or just a meeting with a friend, the odds are that you would make sure of the time and place beforehand, that you would make arrangements to get there as expected of you, that you would have in mind the purpose of your journey, and that you would plan your day around the event. So, in this respect, why do less for God?