

The Shepherd

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FROM THE FATHERS

"JOHN OF VOSTROS, a holy man, who possessed power over impure spirits, asked the demons who dwelt in some possessed maidens, who, because of this were possessed by madness and thus suffered terribly, and the saint said unto them; 'What are the things you fear in Christians?' They answered: Truly you possess three great things: the first is what you wear round your neck; the second is what you wash with in church; the third is what you partake of in the gatherings.' Thereupon he asked them: 'Of these three which do you fear most?' They answered: 'If you guarded well that of which you partake, none of us could ever trip up a Christian.' These things which our deadly enemies fear most are: the Cross, Baptism and Communion."

From the Gerontikon

"THE GREATEST HELP and assistance in purification of the soul, illumination of the mind, sanctification of the body and a Divine transformation of the two, as well as in repulsing passions and demons and, above all, in supernatural union with God, in joining and merging with Him, is frequent communion in the holy, pure, immortal and life-giving Mysteries, the precious Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, approached with a heart and disposition as pure as is possible for man."

Saint Callistos Xanthopoulos, Patriarch of Constantinople, + 1397 A.D.

"COMMON BREAD is improperly called our daily bread, because it strengthens only our body and not our soul. Properly and principally the term daily bread denotes the Body of our Lord and the word of God, because they strengthen the soul as well as the body. For this reason, those of us who have received spiritual regeneration through Divine Baptism must continually eat this spiritual food with warm love and a contrite heart."

Saint Macarius of Corinth, 1731-1805 A.D.

"AS IN YOUR INFANCY you were fed by your mother and lived by her, by her milk, so now, having grown up and become a sinful man, you are fed with the Blood of your Life-giver, in order that through this you may live and grow spiritually into a man, a man of God, a holy man. In short, that as you were then, your mother's son, so now you may become a child of God, brought up and fed upon His Body and Blood, and, above all, with His Spirit, for His Body and Blood are spirit and life, and that you should become an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven, for which reason you were created, and for which you live."

Righteous John of Cronstadt the Wonderworker, 1829-1908 A.D.

THE RATIONAL MAN

According to St Antony the Great

By Constantine Cavarnos INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

SAINT ANTONY (ca. 250-356 A.D.) is one of the great masters of the spiritual life of Eastern Christendom. He has been held in the highest esteem by Christians of the East from his own time down to the present. One of his eminent admirers was St Athanasius, who knew him personally and wrote a biography of him, which is one of the best sources of information we have about him. Two other outstanding admirers of this great saint are St Macarius, Metropolitan of Corinth (1731-1805) and St Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1748-1809). They have included at the beginning of the *Philokalia*, which was compiled and edited by them and published in 1782, a work containing many sayings and observations which have traditionally been attributed to St Antony.

Though he was unlettered, St Antony became a man of remarkable spiritual wisdom and understanding, capable of teaching others by word of mouth concerning God's creation, Providence and Grace, concerning human nature and destiny, and the ways which lead man to self-perfection and salvation. Fragments of his teaching, including those contained in the work just mentioned, entitled *Admonitions on the Character of Men and the Virtuous Life*, have been recorded by others who had listened to him and were impressed by their value.

Many remarkable ideas are contained in this collection of sayings. One of these ideas is that of the "rational man." A good deal is said on this subject, though not in the form of a separate unified section, but of scattered statements. Wishing to present St Antony's teaching on this theme in as precise and meaningful form as possible, I have translated the relevant passages from the original Greek text contained in the *Philokalia*, brought them together, preserving however the sequence in which they appear in this work, and present them below, after some interpretative remarks.

The rational man of St Antony is not the learned man or scholar, is not the dialectician or speculative thinker. He is the God-centred man, the man who directs all his thought and aspiration towards God; who has resolutely turned away from the earthly and temporal towards the heavenly and eternal; who knows what is good and what is evil, and chooses and does what is good and avoids what is evil, or at least consciously strives to do so. He is a man who has radically changed his inner self.

The rational faculty is, for St Antony, the distinguishing attribute of man, is that which distinguishes man from the brutes and makes him akin to God and unites him with God. This faculty is conceived by him as being above all a power of apprehending values, of discriminating good from evil, of ordering one's whole life, inner and outer, with a view to acquiring or doing what is good and avoiding or overcoming what is evil, and of contemplating God. In other words, the function of reason that is considered important is not the speculative but the moral, not the discursive but the intuitive, the contemplative.

This faculty is, according to our saint, present in the majority of men in a latent, inoperative state. As a moral, contemplative power, it is dead. Instead of being

governed by reason, people are dominated by irrational desires; instead of being oriented, as they ought, towards the eternal and divine, they are absorbed in the temporal and material. Their souls are in a state of darkness, devoid of divine light. It follows that they are *not*, strictly speaking, *men*. Only the "*rational man*," whose rational faculty is in an active, operative state is, in the strict sense, a *man*.

It is clear that the "rational man" of St Antony is none other than St Paul's "new man," whose mind has been "renewed" (Rom. 12:2), that is, the Christian mystic, the saint, or one who is on the way to becoming such.

To many non-Orthodox Christians, this teaching of St Antony will appear strange, because Western Christianity has tended to banish reason from the spiritual life or at least to minimise its role. On the other hand, Orthodox Christians, who are familiar with their long tradition, will find this teaching their own, traditional standpoint, expressed in a clear and emphatic manner.

THE TEXT

Men are improperly called rational; it is not those who have studied the sayings and books of the wise men of old who are rational, but those who have a rational soul and can discriminate what is good from what is evil, avoiding what is evil and harmful to the soul, but keeping carefully, through practice, what is good, and doing this with many thanks to God. These men alone truly deserve to be called rational.

The man who is truly rational has only one serious concern, to obey and please God, the Creator of all things. And to this end alone he disciplines his soul, how to do what is acceptable to God, thanking Him for His so great and benevolent providence and government of all things, whatever it may happen to be in the case of his life. For it is absurd to thank physicians for giving us medicines which are bitter and unpleasant, for the sake of the health of our bodies, but to be ungrateful to God for things that appear to us harsh, and not to perceive that everything happens as it ought, and for our interest, and according to His providence.

The rational man, examining himself, approves what is appropriate and useful to him, and distinguishes what is proper to the soul and beneficial to it from what is foreign to it. Thus he avoids what is harmful to the soul as foreign to it and separating him from immortality. He should be called a man who either is rational or is susceptible of being corrected. One who is incorrigible should be called non-human. The rational faculty, when it is truly present in us, makes us worthy of being named men. Lacking the rational faculty, we differ from irrational animals only in the form of our members and in the possession of speech. The truly rational and God-loving soul has a direct knowledge of all things in life; and it lovingly reconciles itself to God, and thanks Him with sincerity, having all its striving and mind directed towards Him. A truly rational and virtuous man is distinguished by his look, walk, voice, smile, manner of spending his time, the circumstances of his life. Everything in his soul has been thoroughly changed and corrected so as to become as beautiful as possible; for the God-loving mind of such persons, like a wide-awake doorkeeper, bars the entry to evil and ugly thoughts.

The rational man strives to free himself from blind alleys, conceit, insolence, deceit, malice, greed, and the like - from everything that is a work of the demons and

of an evil will. Now all things can be achieved through zeal and persistent striving, by a man whose desiring is not directed towards lower pleasures.

Rational men have no need to pay attention to many conversations, but only to those which are profitable, which are guided by God's will; for thus men come back to life and eternal light.

All rudeness should be avoided in conversations; for modesty and self-mastery assuredly characterise rational men even more than virgins; for the God-loving mind is a light which illumines the soul as the sun does the body.

Man's rational faculty unites him with the ineffable divine power, while his bodily faculty makes him akin to the animals. Now few persons, those who are perfect men and rational, strive to keep their minds directed to Him Who is God and Saviour, and to retain their kinship with Him. And this they show by their deeds and virtuous way of life. The majority of men, on the other hand, whose souls lack rationality, having abandoned that divine and immortal sonship, incline towards the dead, unfortunate, short-lived kinship with the body. Like irrational animals, minding the things of the body and inflamed by lusts, they separate themselves from God and drag the soul from heaven to the abyss of its (animal) desires.

The rational man, taking to heart communion and union with God, will never direct his love to anything earthly or mean, but will keep his mind directed towards the heavenly and eternal. He knows that God's will, being the cause of all goods and the source of eternal blessings for men, is that man be saved.

Those who dislike knowing what is beneficial and what has been well said are considered as being in a bad state. In the case of those, on the other hand, who, while knowing the truth, quarrel shamelessly, reason has become dead and their character bestialised; and they do not know God, nor is their soul illumined.

Just as we have received the sense of sight from God in order that we may know phenomena, e.g. what white is and what black is, so also has the rational faculty been given us by God in order that we may distinguish the things that are good for the soul. But desire, divorced from reason, begets pleasure and does not allow the soul to be saved or to be united with God.

To escape death is impossible. Knowing this, men who are truly rational and disciplined in the virtues and in God-loving thoughts, accept death without sighs, fear, and mourning, remembering the fact that it is inevitable and is a deliverance from the evils of life.

A real man strives to be pious. Now one is pious who does not desire alien things. Alien things to man are all created things. Therefore, he despises them all, being an image of God. A man becomes an image of God when he orders his life rightly and agreeably to God; and this is impossible unless a man detaches himself from worldly things. Now he who has a God-loving mind knows well everything that is profitable to the soul and every act of piety which he should perform.

All those souls which are not steered by the rational faculty and governed by the mind, so that it restrains and prevails over and governs their passions, i.e. pain and pleasure; - such souls perish like the irrational animals, carried away by the passions, like a charioteer by the horses.

The rational man selects what is best and knows God, the Creator of all things. And he thanks Him and sings hymns of praise to Him, despises the body even before death, and does not allow evil sensations to be fulfilled, knowing their destructive action.

A rational and God-loving man, remembering and reflecting on the evils (that befall impure souls) after death, lives piously, lest he be condemned of them and suffer them. Unbelievers, on the other hand, whose soul is devoid of rationality, live impiously, sinfully, disdainingly the things that befall souls in the other world.

He is a man who has understood what the body is, namely, corruptible and short-lived. Such a man understands, too, what the soul is, namely divine and immortal and, being a breath of God, has been joined to the body to be proved and deified. Now he who has rightly understood the soul orders his life in a manner pleasing to God, not yielding to the body. And seeing God with his mind, he also contemplates mentally the eternal goods which are granted to the soul by God.

The rational soul, remaining immovable in its good resolutions, steers like horses the spirited and appetitive elements, its irrational parts. And having overcome and restrained them and become their master, it is crowned and deemed worthy of the heavenly life. It receives the prize for this victory and its painful efforts from God Who created it.

The truly rational man, seeing the happiness of the wicked and the prosperity of the unworthy, is not disturbed by imagining the pleasures of such persons in this life, as irrational men are. For he knows clearly both the inconstancy of fortune, and the uncertainty and brevity of life, and the fact that Judgment is beyond bribery; and he believes that he is not being neglected by God as far as his really necessary nourishment is concerned. The rational man, despising material things and this brief life, chooses heavenly bliss and eternal life, which he receives from God through his virtuous mode of life.

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From

"THE HOUSE OF GOD AND THE CHURCH SERVICES"

By the Priest N. R. Antonov

Continuation

SECTION THREE

THE ORDER AND EXPLANATION OF THE DIVINE LITURGY

§ 69. Understanding the Liturgy and its Derivation. The Liturgy occupies first place amongst the church services. During the Liturgy, the most sacred Mystery of Communion, which was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ at the Mystical Supper before His suffering on the Cross, is celebrated. When He had washed the feet of His disciples to show them an example of humility, the Lord took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to the disciples, saying: "Take, eat, this is My Body." Then He took the cup

of grape wine, and having offered praise to God, imparted it to the disciples, saying: "Drink ye all from it; for this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:26-28). When He had given the Apostles Communion, the Lord gave them the commandment to always celebrate this Mystery: "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). The Apostles actually celebrated Holy Communion according to the command and the example of Jesus Christ, and they in turn ordered that every Christian community that arose should likewise celebrate the Mystery of Holy Communion. At first, the form and order of the service of the Liturgy was passed down orally, and later written expositions of the Liturgy began to appear. And little by little, the Liturgy itself was enriched by new prayers, hymns and sacred rites.

In the Church of Christ, the Liturgy always has been celebrated, and it will always be celebrated until the end of this age, because through Holy Communion we enter into union with Jesus Christ and we are cleansed of our sins. The very word Communion derives from the Greek, *koinonia*, and indicates participation, because thanks to this Mystery we enter into union first with Jesus Christ, and then with each other. Concerning communion in this first sense we have the words of Jesus Christ, "He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me and I in him" (see John 6:54-56). And concerning communion in the second sense we have the words of the Apostle Paul: "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (see 1 Cor. 10:16-17).

§ 70. The Naming and Substance of the Liturgy. The Liturgy has various names. The first of these, the Liturgy, is a Greek word meaning "the common service" or "the work of the people," and it is so named because the Mystery of Holy Communion is the propitiatory sacrifice, offered to God for the sins of the whole company of the believers, for the sins of all the people whether living or dead. As the Mystery of Holy Communion is at the same time a thanksgiving, a sacrifice of praise to God, it is also called the Eucharist, from the Greek word for thanksgiving, *evkharistein*. Among the Russians it also commonly referred to as *Obednya*, a word related to their word *obed*, which means dinner or lunch. This is simply because in parish practice it was often served towards midday, but it also links with the fact that the service is the Lord's Supper, because therein the Body and Blood of Christ are offered in the Mystery of Communion (see 1 Cor. 10:21; 11:20). The service is, of course, often simply called the Lord's Supper. In Apostolic times, the Liturgy was referred to as the breaking of bread (Acts 3:46), and the Passover (see 1 Cor. 5:7-8). The life and teachings of Jesus Christ, beginning from His birth until His ascension into the Heavens, are commemorated at the Liturgy, as are the saving blessings which we receive from Him here on earth.

§71. The Sections of the Liturgy. The order of the Liturgy is as follows: a) first the things are prepared for the Mystery, then, b) the faithful are prepared for the Mystery, and last of all, c) the Mystery itself is celebrated that the faithful may partake of Communion. The first part is called the Proskomidi; the second part, during which the faithful are prepared for the Mystery, is called the Liturgy of the Catechumens, and the third part is called the Liturgy of the Faithful.

§ 72. The First Part of the Liturgy, the Proskomidi or Offering. The first part of the Liturgy, in which the things are prepared for the Mystery, is called the "offering" or

"oblation," because in ancient times, as still happens in many churches, the faithful brought bread and wine for the Eucharist. The bread loaves are called "prosporas," which also means offerings.

Bread and wine are the material things needed for the Mystery of Communion. The bread must be leavened, pure, wheat bread. The bread must be leavened rather than unleavened, because in the institution of the Mystery, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself took leavened bread. We use wheaten bread as well because Jesus Christ compared Himself to a "corn of wheat" (John 12:24). In outward appearance the prosphora itself has three distinctive features: a) it is made in two parts (somewhat like a cottage loaf) which are joined together, and this is to signify the two natures of Jesus Christ, Divine and human; b) it is marked with the sign of the Cross on top, to show that this bread is dedicated to sacred purposes; and c) in the four corners made by the arms of the Cross, it has the letters IC, XC, NI, KA, which means Jesus Christ Conquereth.

The wine must be grape wine and red, because Jesus Christ Himself used such wine at the Mystical Supper. In remembrance of the Saviour's Passion, in the proskomidi, the wine is mixed with a little water, signifying that, at the time of His Passion, blood and water flowed from the pierced side of the Saviour.

In the Russian practice five prosporas are used in the proskomidi, although among the Greeks, one larger prosphora is used of which the seal, in the form of a Greek Cross, comprises five seals. Communion is given, however, only from the principal section cut from the prospora, which is called the Lamb, just as the Apostle says: "we being many are one bread... for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17).

... To be continued with "A General Overview of the Proskomidi."

Translator's Note: *In the above section, as in previous and subsequent ones, we have adapted Fr Antonov's work to accord with contemporary practice, sometimes abridging what he says, and sometimes adding to his text for greater clarity.*

NEWS ON THE PROGRESS OF THE MISSION IN MADAGASCAR

From His Grace, Bishop Nectarios of Madagascar

ONCE AGAIN with the Grace of God, we come to the close of another year. (*This report was obviously first circulated at the end of last year - ed.*) The year 2002 was a challenging one for the Orthodox Mission of Madagascar. The Malagasy people suffered greatly whilst the nation was experiencing political turmoil at the beginning of the year. Unemployment levels rose, with some 600,000 people losing work as a result of the even further slump in the economy. Road blocks and barricades at all major ports made it impossible for the nation to receive imported goods such as foodstuffs and fuel. Many supplies had been depleted and famine was creeping in. Unfortunately, many perished amongst the violent street protests and riots.

Our mission came to the aid of many of our Orthodox brethren who were touched by the harsh effects of this civil war. We provided relief aid through the distribution of food, clothing and medications to those in need.

Although the political crisis made our mission work difficult, we did not lose hope, but continued to minister amongst the people. With the help of God, we managed to complete the construction of another four churches in Fianarantsoa, Taomasina, and Antananarivo areas. Now our mission comprises 63 parishes and 40 churches. Another two churches are currently under construction, namely the Birth of the Virgin Mary in Andranovory and St George in Ihosy.

Apart from our mission to convey the True Faith to the Malagasy people, we are also deeply involved in various philanthropic projects. Madagascar, ranking as one of the poorest nations in the world, has many orphaned children who roam the streets begging from strangers in order to survive. Many children remain uneducated and are forced to earn a living at a very young age, by either selling charcoal or herding cattle. For this reason, the mission has taken the initiative to care for some 250 orphans, thus providing meals and clothing as well as educational and medical assistance for these children. One major future project is the building of a large orphanage (when appropriate funds have been gathered), in which the children may be better cared for.

A great event that occurred in the last year, not only for our Diocese, but for all of Orthodoxy was the blessing of the foundation stone for the cathedral of the Transfiguration of our Lord in the island nation of Mauritius. This was a very important event because this will be the first Orthodox church on the island. We pray that the Orthodox Church will expand throughout the whole island.

Finally, we ask all our friends of the mission to pray for our native brethren, for in recent months another calamity struck Madagascar. A deadly strain of the influenza type A virus swept across the island claiming some 800 lives. Many of our faithful were affected by this virus. We hope that the New Year will bring an end to this epidemic, and prove to be a progressive and eventful one for our mission.

THE COMING MONTH

MAY, this year, takes us through the latter part of the forty-day long festival of Pascha, and through the whole of the Great Feast of the Lord's Ascension (23rd May/5th June), which lasts for nine days, and whose leavetaking therefore falls on the last day of the month. The whole month thus falls within Pentecost, the fifty day long festal period which falls between the Saviour's Resurrection and the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Sunday of Pentecost-Trinity. Because of the festal nature of this period, we do not make prostrations during the services or kneel in church, and the Wednesday and Friday fasting disciplines are less strict than in other seasons. Throughout this period, the Apostle readings in the Divine Liturgy are taken from the Book of Acts, and the Gospel readings from St John. Thus, we witness the life of the young New Testament Church, and we learn the most profound theological truths upon which that life was, and indeed is, founded.

As if it were the culmination of the knowledge gleaned from these readings, the last Sunday in this period, that which falls within the feast of the Ascension, is dedicated to the Holy Fathers of the First Œcumenical Council. The First Council was

convened on 20th May 325 A.D., on the initiative of the Emperor St Constantine the Great, and it was held in the city of Nicaea, probably because at that time Byzantium had yet to be re-founded as Constantinople, the New Rome, an event which we also celebrate in May on 11th/24th, and which took place in the year 330 A.D. The most important work of the Council was its rejection of the heresy of Arius. His teaching, now known to us as Arianism, that the Son of God was created, and that there was a time when He was not, was decisively rejected by the Council. To endorse the true teaching the Fathers of the Council adopted an ancient creed used by the Church of Jerusalem, only adding to it the word "homoousios" (of one essence) with reference to the Son's Divinity. The Council also regulated the computation of the date of Pascha, and introduced the system used by the Orthodox to this day. A move was made at that time to impose celibacy on the clergy, but this was rejected by the Fathers, and paradoxically it was one of the Egyptian desert fathers, an ascetic and a disciple of St Antony the Great himself, Abba Paphnutius, who spoke most eloquently again burdening the clergy by such a stricture. 318 Orthodox hierarchs participated in the Council, which brought its deliberations to a close on 25th July. It is celebrated on the Sunday within Ascensiontide for two reasons: first because it was convened at about that time of year, and secondly because in the Ascension we see the God-manhood of our Saviour most clearly manifest, and it was against this saving truth that Arius had contended.

As a matter of interest we noted above the commemoration of the Founding of Constantinople on 11th May, and in May also we celebrate the memory of St Constantine, the founder of the city, and his mother St Helena (21st May/3rd June). Not only did St Constantine play a pivotal role in Christian history, freeing the Christians from persecution and eventually establishing the Church, but he is also closely connected with Britain, for it was here, in 306 A.D., at York, that he was proclaimed Cæsar, in succession to his father, Constantius Chlorus. The event caused the rhetorician Eumenius to exclaim: "O fortunate Britain, and now happier than all countries, which hast first seen Constantine made Caesar!" There is a local tradition, that St Helena was a native Briton and from Colchester. There is no sound historical evidence for this although it might have been the case. The city of Treves on the continent also claimed her as one of its natives. It is much more likely that she was born in Drepanum, a town in the Gulf of Nicomedia, whose name St Constantine changed to Helenopolis in memory of his mother. We also know that Constantius Chlorus was required to divorce St Helena, about ten years before he first arrived in Britain, so the story of his marrying a beautiful British princess is probably just a romance, although not altogether impossible. Of St Constantine's presence in Britain we have sound historical evidence, and it may be, of course, that his mother visited him here, and perhaps even visited Colchester, then a prominent Roman administrative and military centre. Perhaps this, and the fact that there is much local devotion to her in the town, rather than her being born there, is the real link between Colchester and St Helena.

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

I have a question regarding the blessing of food. As a child, I had always been taught to cross myself before eating. This was always taken as a gesture

of thanksgiving towards God for the food provided, and not as a blessing of the meal. However, I do remember once seeing Elder Ephraim of St Anthony's Monastery making the cross over a glass of water before drinking it. I imagine that the blessing of food refers to the latter action as opposed to the former. Can you clarify this for me please? Regarding blessing in general, what do blessings actually do? Also, why can only the clergy bless water, vestments, etc.? Does the Holy Spirit already dwell inside them, or do they have certain 'rights' to call down the Holy Spirit, whereas others don't? S. S. Epsom

IT IS QUITE NORMAL to make the sign of the Cross over food or drinks and in fact many of the Fathers enjoin this. Also I remember reading somewhere that in the old days, cooks would bless the foods as they prepared them, or even place the utensils over a bowl, crossed as a sign of the Cross. I wonder if the English superstition of not allowing knives to remain crossed is a demon's eye view of this?

I do not know if can answer what blessings do! What does prayer do? We are not telling God His job. We are not requiring Him to do anything, or pointing out something He is not aware of. I suppose most of all we are showing love for the people we are praying for and to that extent joining in God's love for them. With blessings - we are showing that we are consciously committing things to God's care for us; we are protecting them from malign forces; we are instructing ourselves that there is a world other than the material one and that it influences our lives.

Why can only the priests do some blessings? I think to put it very badly that it is largely a question of "jurisdiction." A layman has a ministry of care for himself and for his dependents: family, children, servants, etc. A priest has a wider ministry to all his parishioners and to all those who approach him as a priest, and thus those things which involve the whole community are blessed by him. There is also a concept of permanence here, a layman blesses his meal, eats it and it is gone. But if an icon is blessed it remains in the Church perhaps for generations. And this leads on to a third differentiation: the priest is supposed to have a clearer grasp of the teachings of the Church than the average layman, and so certain things are reserved to him because he can better assess them. For instance, with the icons - if laymen blessed them, they might take a Roman Catholic depiction of "Saint" Theresa of Avila and "bless" it. A priest should know better.

Then, of course, because of his ministry, because of the grace which he has received at ordination, God does work through the priest in a way that he does not with the layman. So if you like "Yes, he has rights." [Better to say: "he has a ministry."] Such an exercise of grace does not depend on his personal spiritual state; it is a gift of the Church. So I serve the Liturgy and am enabled to impart the Holy Mysteries to the people, and Saint Nicolas Planas did the same, but I shall never even approach his sanctity.

NEWS SECTION

MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE PROPOSES AN AUTO-NOMOUS WESTERN EUROPEAN METROPOLIA

ON 1st APRIL, His Holiness Patriarch Aleksii II of Moscow addressed a letter to "all Orthodox parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe." In this important document which runs to nearly three A4 pages, he and his Synod consider the difficulties in Church life faced by his compatriots in the diaspora, and in particular the jurisdictional differences which divide them. In his overview of the situation, he recognises that parishes in the West have developed "a multinational character and in liturgical practice make widespread use of local languages, which since the time of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Peers of the Apostles, has invariably been a characteristic of Orthodox pastoral and missionary work." Referring to the work of the "Commission on the Future of the Archdiocese of Russian Orthodox parishes in Western Europe," the Patriarchal Synod proposes an autonomous Metropolia for Western Europe, under the care of His Grace Metropolitan Antony Bloom. The letter invites hierarchs of all the Russian jurisdictions to join this initiative and become close collaborators and assistants to Metropolitan Antony. In the first instance this initiative is opened to those in the far west of the continent, but it envisions a second stage and invites the hierarchs in Germany and Central Europe to join, including our own Archbishop Mark. The patriarchal initiative then goes further and expresses the hope that the autonomous Metropolia thus formed "will serve, at a time pleasing to God, as the foundation for the future canonical establishment of a multinational Local Orthodox Church of Western Europe, to be built in a spirit of conciliarity by all the Orthodox faithful living in those countries."

It is immediately evident that the Patriarchal initiative is well intended, although it does raise certain concerns. The formation of an Autonomous Metropolia of parishes of the Russian tradition might indeed form the nucleus of a future Local Church of Western Europe, but it may also be that Orthodox of other ethnic traditions might feel excluded by such an initiative and thus hostile to it, and so rather than facilitating the establishment of a Local Church it might prove a hindrance to it. We have the precedent of the situation in America, where Moscow granted the Orthodox Church in America autocephaly, a situation which for nearly thirty years now has not been accepted by the majority of Orthodox Christians in America. There is no indication whether the Moscow Synod consulted with the other Orthodox Churches present in Western Europe before issuing this letter, as might have been advisable to avoid such a situation as the American one. (One naughtily wonders, too, whether this may not in some sort be a riposte to the Vatican for setting up dioceses within the Russian Federation.)

Further, the fact that the Metropolia is to be headed by Metropolitan Antony of Sourozh poses two problems: first, that he is a somewhat controversial figure within Russian Orthodoxy and his teaching has for decades caused disquiet among the more traditional Orthodox in all the jurisdictions, and secondly, he is now well advanced in years and had in fact petitioned to retire, and so will inevitably be soon replaced, and the question is, by whom?

Also, it appears, although it might not indeed be the case, that this initiative is solely the work of the Moscow Synod. One would have thought that if what in a recent paper Bishop Basil of Sergievo (MP) referred to as the "splinter groups" (the Paris Exarchate and ROCA) were being invited to join, they might have been consulted in drawing up the proposal.

And more importantly than any of the foregoing, the fundamental reasons why the "splinter groups" have been separated from the Patriarchate for decades have not been touched upon at all. It appears that the solution has been arrived at, before the problems have been considered.

As yet, it is early days and there has not been a considered response to the Patriarchal initiative from leading clergymen of the other jurisdictions, and so we cannot comment on their likely response. Perhaps, we may hope that, at the very least, the letter will open doors to consideration of the problems which make it unlikely that the Patriarch's proposals will be easily achieved.

SERBIAN CHURCH'S PASCHAL EPISTLE

Patriarch Pavle and the hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church have addressed a paschal epistle to their spiritual children throughout the world. In it they speak very beautifully of the spiritual significance of suffering, and their letter addresses a warning to those, seeking to avoid suffering and the Cross, who try to "reform the Church": "People of this world constantly talk about reforms in society and try to create a 'new man.' Basing their reforms on changing 'trivial matters' and on superficial adaptations to the spirit of this age, without any appreciation for the life-bearing fire of Christ's Resurrection which establishes, renews and perpetuates everything it touches, they themselves become captives of emptiness and impermanence. These are the kind of people who would also like to reform the Church, living under the delusion that it is like worldly, human organisations which, in order to survive, must constantly change and adapt themselves. But the Church measures life by the perfect measure of Christ's Resurrection and the human dignity it reveals. As such it never ceases to renew every person who comes into this world, as well as every area and every structure of human life, calling them to constantly greater perfection and change for the better."

TEN-YEAR OLD ORTHODOX VICTIM OF THE TERROR IN THE HOLY LAND

CHRISTINA SA'ADA, a student at St Joseph's School in Bethlehem, who often worshiped at the Church of the Nativity, was in a car with her parents and her older sister Marianne, on 25th March, when she was shot dead by Israeli soldiers. Her sister was shot in the knee and her father, Mr George Sa'ada, the principal of the Orthodox School in Beit Sahour, was shot in the back. Christina was shot in the head and died immediately. She was laid to rest on 28th March, her father and sister unable to attend as they were receiving treatment in hospital. May she find rest with the Saints, and may her blood cry unto the Lord for an end to the violence inflicted upon innocent people in the Holy Land in the name of the iniquitous War Against Terrorism.

VATICAN TO RETURN ICON

HIS HOLINESS, Pope John Paul II is reported to be eager to return an icon of the Mother of God of Kazan to Russia, which is presently in his keeping. The Icon which

some believe to be the original Wonderworking Kazan Icon, which appeared in 1579, has been kept at the Vatican since 1993, having been brought out of Russia after the Revolution. Other sources state definitely that the icon in question is not the original and is even of different dimensions. The Pope is due to visit Mongolia in August and it has been suggested that he might stop over en route in Kazan to return the Icon. This suggestion has not been received warmly by the Moscow Patriarchate, which has not welcomed the prospect of a papal visit to Russia.

IRAQ AND ABORTION CONTRASTED BY A JEW

DAVID LIFSCHULTZ, a New York Jew, who believes the Torah but rejects the Talmud and Zionism, as being contrary to his Scriptures, published the following statement on the internet on 3/4/03: "While Iraq is denounced as an absolute evil, the United States has promoted the slaughter of 40 million living souls through abortion, and over 400 million worldwide, which by Biblical doctrine would be considered far worse than anything that occurred in Germany and Russia between 1918-1945 as the unborn souls are defenceless. Though Bush has proclaimed that he is against abortion, he has hardly given it the attention as he has given the 'absolute' evil of Iraq, and his efforts are reminiscent of what Benjamin Disraeli said of the British politicians in "Coningsby," that you talk Christianity to get votes, but never really do anything Christian. As far as countries as Iraq, Iran and Syria, I have come across no articles where abortion is said to be promoted in those countries, and Islamic Iran has linked with the Vatican at United Nations Conferences to oppose abortion." Mr Lifschultz directs his criticism first against his own country and its leader, George W. Bush. Might we not also say the same of our own leaders who profess "Christianity" very publicly but have not put a fraction of the resources that they threw into the Second Gulf War into the Pro-Life movement, and have done next to nothing to stop the slaughter of the unborn?

BROOKWOOD NEWS

BAPTISM AT SAINT EDWARD'S: On the Sunday of St Mary of Egypt (13th April), after the Vespers for her feastday, Zoe-Marie, the infant daughter of Vasileos and Evphemia Calcanteras of Wood Street Village, was baptised, chrismated and given Holy Communion for the first time at Saint Edward's. Her sponsors at the font were Annie Shaw and Miss Elizabeth Meade. Her chrism robe was removed at the end of the Divine Liturgy on the Great Feast of Palm Sunday. May the Lord God grant that His newly illumined handmaid may serve Him faithfully all the days of her life, and gain the prize laid up for her in the Heavens.

FUNERAL: On Saturday 5th April, the funeral of Bogdan Petru Chelariu, who had died on the previous Wednesday, was chanted at Brookwood. Bogdan was a young Romanian, who had come to Britain for medical treatment. Father Ioan Fodor from Putna, Romania, and Father Eugen Darie from Bacau conducted the service. Bogdan's body had been brought to the church as we chanted the Akathist Hymn on the Friday evening and was present at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the Soul Sabbath, on Saturday morning. In carrying him to his grave, the procession stopped twelve times to read at each station one of the Twelve Resurrectional Gospels. He died aged 21, but

may the Saviour now grant that he dwell for all eternity in the mansions of the just. May his memory be eternal!

GIFT OF RELICS: In an earlier issue we reported the visit of Archpriest Nicolas Florinsky from Kishenev to Brookwood. Recently through the good offices of Dimitri and Olga Popov, whom he met in Moscow, he sent our church the gift of portions of the sacred relics of the holy Great Martyr Theodore the Recruit, and of the Seventy Venerable Martyrs of Prevlak in Montenegro. These latter martyrs were slain by poisoning by Latinizers in the mid fifteenth century. Their relics were recovered in November 1996.

FR NIPHON & THE TWENTY MAYORS & MAYORESSES: It sounds the stuff of legends, but actually happened! On Tuesday 15th April, a Civic Day was held in Woking, and some twenty mayors and their consorts from Surrey boroughs attended. On their itinerary was a visit to Brookwood Cemetery, which included Saint Edward's Church. Fr Niphon greeted them at the church and gave them a short talk about it, Saint Edward and Holy Orthodoxy. Both the Mayor of Woking, Cllr Mrs Mehala Gosling, and the Borough Council organiser of the day, Pauline Jackson, have written thanking our community for receiving their party, and saying that the visit to the church "added something special to our visit to the cemetery."

TALK: Fr Alexis gave a second talk to an informal group at the Meade's apartment in London on Wednesday 16th April, the principal theme being "Death and Resurrection." Nada the Serb raised many points of issue.

PRACTICAL TIP

IT IS CUSTOMARY, when entering church, to make the sign of the Cross three times, each with deep bows. In some Russian churches, at certain seasons, they make full prostrations. Do not do this simply as a rite or carelessly -nothing should be done like that in worship, but use it to set a threshold. Often as they make these bows, the faithful repeat to themselves the psalmic verses: "But as for me, in the multitude of Thy mercy shall I go into Thy house; I shall worship toward Thy holy temple in fear of Thee. O Lord, guide me in the way of Thy righteousness; because of mine enemies, make straight my way before Thee" (Ps. 5:6-7).

Here various precepts are set forth. First, that it is through God's mercy that we are permitted to enter His house and pray; it is a privilege, not simply a duty, much less a custom or a burden. Secondly, there is resolution - "I shall worship," and in a special way "in fear of Thee." Not talk, not be distracted, criticise, day-dream, - but worship. Thirdly, a prayer for God's guidance in the way of righteousness, and that implies repentance, a change from what has gone before, when in the world outside we were careless about such things. Fourthly, we have a reference to dangers from enemies, and later in this same psalm the psalmist explains that these enemies have no truth in their mouth, their heart is vain, that they have spoken deceitfully, and so it is clear that they are the demons, and thus we are reminded that we are entering into an arena of spiritual combat. There is, then, need for preparedness and for hoping on God's aid. Making those reverences, let us remember these verses and take them to heart.