



Orthodoxy Alive and Well in Langley, B.C.

Combining the traditions of our various Orthodox ancestries with our Canadian awareness, the St Nicholas Orthodox Christian Church is flourishing in this growing suburb of Vancouver.

A warm and friendly community, the St Nicholas parish has accomplished an amazing amount with very few people. The church building is still being paid for, but it has been repainted, renovated and rebuilt on the inside with a completely new sanctuary and ikonostas. Designed and constructed by Milorad (Miki) Jahura, with the help of David Evans, Lars Loojen, Lareina and Naomi Evans, the ikonostas is finished in genuine walnut

vener. The arches were hand laminated by Milorad, who worked late into the night after a full day's work at his regular job, so that the ikonostas would be ready for Pascha. This completes stage two of our three-stage rebuilding of the sanctuary. The sanctuary floor and solea were rebuilt earlier. The final stage will be the vestry and painting and finishing of the inside wall of the ikonostas.

An active parish, St Nicholas' congregation has a regular Bible study class, co-hosts an annual retreat (together with St Tikhons in Chilliwack and the Monastery of All Saints of North America in Sardis), and features an an-

nual Balkan Ethnic Banquet each year.

The parish is thoroughly Canadian and all services are celebrated in English, but the ancient Orthodox roots of most of its members are clearly evident. In welcoming converts into the Church, every effort is made to guide them to the development of a firmly Orthodox ethos and "mind-set". The Orthodox worldview and general philosophy of life is very much stressed in this parish. The central theme of parish life is not "doing good" or even "service to the parish," it is "the salvation of the soul," "working out our salvation with, in the words of the Apostle, 'fear and trembling'."

The parish follows the Traditional Orthodox calendar and liturgical cycle, and is dedicated to Traditional Orthodoxy, but in a moderate, open and loving way.

The Saint Nicholas Parish extends a special invitation to any of our readers who may be travelling in B.C., or if you happen to live nearby, the church is located at 4828 216-A St in Langley. Liturgy begins at 10 AM.

Fr Varlaam and the faithful of the St Nicholas Parish wish to thank all those who donated to the special St Nicholas Sanctuary Fund for new ikons and construction.



1. Saint Nicholas Canadian Orthodox Church, 4828 - 216A St, Langley, B.C.

2. Milorad (Miki) Jahura, assisted by Lareina and Naomi Evans, works on the ikonostas.

3. The nearly completed ikonostas awaits the Royal Gates and remaining ikons.





3. Baptism of Jovan Jovanovich. Godfather, Milan Bodioga reads the symbol of faith. Jovan is the second child of Dragan and Sheila Jovanovich of White Rock, B.C. The Godfather is owner of the internationally known "Dubrovnik" restaurant in Winnipeg.



4. Nikodemos (Richard) Morgan was baptized into the Holy Church on Great, Holy Saturday, according to a most ancient tradition of the Church. Godparents were Magdalena Almas and Radislav Jahura.



5. One week later, on Thomas Sunday, the new daughter of Nikodemos-Richard and Elenora Morgan was baptized. Named Emily, for St Emilian, her godparents were David and Jasmine Evans.

In keeping with the more ancient practice of the Orthodox Church, baptisms are celebrated here during the Liturgy, just before the Trisagion. The "Holy God" is replaced with "All those who have been baptized".



6. Fr Lazar was invited to host the "Seasons of Celebration" exhibit on Eastern Christianity at the Richmond Art Gallery, with a lecture and tour of the exhibit for visitors.



7. Fr Moses poses with Maia Aspinwall at the Tlingit Indian Thunderbird totempole in Ketchikan, Alaska. Frs Moses and Lazar had gone to Alaska to serve a memorial for Vasili (T.J.) Aspinwall.

THE EDUCATION OF OUR YOUTH

by
Fr Stephen Wallsteadt

4 The Years of Rapid Growth

The public school system is a formidable competitor for the Church. It offers a wide variety of activities, its teachers are trained and educated in their specialties, and children spend many hours in its programs. Indeed, teachers may see more of some children than their parents do! It is during these years of public education that our Orthodox children are secularized and drawn away from the Faith. Too many parents simply turn over all educational responsibility for their offspring to the schools and later are horrified at the result. In the United States there is a renewed controversy over sex education in the schools, generated by the AIDS epidemic crisis. What the controversy brings home to the Church is that the school has taken over even the most basic physical and moral education of our children. Neither parents nor the Church are doing their jobs as educators of our young. The schools are operating in a void of ignorance and misinformation caused by parental neglect. And when the schools teach sexuality and morality, Christianity (Orthodox or any other variety) will not be a consideration.

Church School efforts are often perceived by children as boring and amateurish. They are something parents send children to because they don't want to take the responsibility of learning and teaching themselves. There is no better teacher than a parent. Parents are teachers whether they want to be or not: their children see their behaviour and values and imitate or reject them. Unless parents are part of the Church's teaching plan, the plan will fail. The Church and parents need to become allies to save their children. Church School planning needs to include parents and families in its activities. A Church community that supports its religious education of the young is one that will grow. If Church committees are looking for no-cost, little-effort ways to teach children, they will probably fail.

To rate our parish and its Church School activities, we might ask ourselves some basic questions to see how serious we

are about getting the job of teaching our children done effectively:

1. What does the parish spend on the education of its children?
2. What recognition are children given in church?
3. What does the parish know about its Church School? Does it help with the Church School? What do you know about your Church School's program?
4. Does the parish have a playground? Playground equipment?
5. What does the Church School do for fun? Does it take field trips or go camping? Are parents involved?
6. Does the Church School keep the parents advised about what it is teaching? Are parents encouraged to talk with their children about their physical and spiritual development?
7. If you were a child, would you want to be in your parish Church School?

We are not professional educators in most Church Schools, but we are Orthodox Christian believers who want to serve God through His children. What we lack, God can teach us. We live in an era when religious, Orthodox religious literature, is abundant. Every month brings new books. Does your parish have a library for its members? Or does it have a small selection of books and literature for sale? It should.

In our competition for the hearts and minds of its school age children, the Church has some very real advantages, for all that we have said about its failures. As the Body of Christ, we can offer:

1. Participation in a spiritual world: children of elementary school age are naturally drawn to that which is holy and mystical. This is the age to form the spiritual habits of frequent Confession and Holy Communion so that they become a part of their life.

2. Christian love and understanding: adults should avoid playing the part of judges with children. We can persuade by loving example and a forgiving spirit. Playing the role of policeman in our children's moral and spiritual development is not the way to help them understand that God loves them and so do we.

3. A sense of belonging: we need to impart the realization that we are all the Children of God. Some of us are just older and more experienced. In God's family, the Church, we are all learners and valuable members. We are always at home in our Father's house.

Above all else, the Church needs to impart to its children two vital pieces of knowledge:

1. That they are important, that God loves them and created them, and that they have real worth.
2. That nowhere are they so important or loved as in the Church. Our adult attitudes toward the Church and our love for the things of God can be communicated only if they are real.

Children of elementary school age have to be included in parish activities and their programs given time and financial support by the church community. What we do speaks much louder than what we say. No amount of talk will persuade the young that we care about them; they deal in the concrete and the tangible. Our rhetoric is judged by our actions.

Responsibility is also something our children need to learn in the home and the Church School. And responsibility comes only when you are given something to be responsible for. Whatever duties or tasks we give children need to be important ones — for the whole Church or for themselves. Whether it be serving, singing, helping out with adult projects, learning the Faith, or practicing the life of prayer, there should be emphasis on responsibility and accountability — to the Church, to ourselves, to our families, to God. The message given should be that we need their love and support just as they need ours. Only then will the children be able to glimpse the reality of their importance in the Church and before God.

The battle for the souls of children is fought before they go to the upper grades. If we lose them in the early years of elementary school, there will be no use fighting to win them back in their teenage years.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter:

Recently I was told by a Protestant acquaintance that the Orthodox and Roman Catholics are the "Nikolaitans" referred to in the Book of Revelations. He said that they have proven that the name of this heresy comes from the meaning of the name "Nicholas", which means "victory over the people". This refers to the priesthood and bishops having taken power for themselves in the Church and insisting that the people believe what the priests tell them instead of whatever they want to believe.

I have not been able to get an answer to this and our priest suggested that I write to you.

Reply:

There is a considerable interest in the Book of Revelation at the present time, and it has generated so many often mythic and bizarre interpretations among the Protestants.

Three major faults have been profoundly evident in these sectarian speculations. In the first place, they are divorced from the living, Holy Spirit filled history of the Church, and their interpretations are therefore based on empty speculations, contemporary circumstances and prominent philosophical movements of a given era. They are completely separated from the Spirit-filled history and life of the Holy Church, unaware of the things preserved faithfully in the Orthodox Church by the indwelling Holy Spirit from the beginning.

Ironically, most Protestant sects are themselves

semi-Nikolaitans. Who Were the Nikolaitans?

The sect was founded around Nicholas of Antioch, from which it took its name. Evidence from ancient Church writers and historians indicates that his wife was the moving force of the heresy. Nicholas was one of the seven deacons ordained in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5). It is uncertain whether Nicholas was a Hellenized Jew or a Greek; but the fact that he was called a "prostelyte" indicates that he was a Greek who had adopted Judaism and then become a Christian. He apostatized from the Orthodox faith and spread his heretical teachings in Asia Minor after the dispersion which occurred following the martyrdom of James, and moreso after the destruction of Jerusalem. His sect was most important in Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira. St John the Theologian, author of the Revelation, was bishop at Ephesus, and the other two cities were within his Apostolic district, so he had an intense personal struggle with Nikolaitanism and it is no wonder that it is especially singled out in the letters addressed to those cities in the Revelation. The Nikolaitans are also sometimes referred to as "Balaamites", and were condemned not only by St John but also by Apostle Peter (2 Peter, Chapter 2) and Jude, and Apostle Paul contended with them at Ephesus and perhaps at Corinth.

What was the Heresy?

The root of the Nikolaitan heresy was precisely in the rejection of the authority of the councils and canons of the Church, and the rejection of its

hierarchical structure of deacons, priests and bishops with apostolic succession. Its most dramatic immediate manifestation was the insistence of its followers to eat meat from animals which had been offered to idols and then sold in the market places, its practice of moral licence (in direct rejection of the authority of the canons of the Jerusalem Council — Acts 15—). It was because of this that the Nikolaitans were called Balaamites and their heresy referred to as "the error of Balaam." In the Old Testament, Balaam had conspired to cause the Israelites to fall into idolatry and fornication, so that they could be conquered (Nm.25-31).

The Nikolaitans claimed to be true followers of Christ, and their preaching must have been impressive and emotionally very rousing, for they won followers away from the Apostles themselves. In their delusion and spiritual pride, they claimed for themselves special prophetic gifts, and the wife of Nicholas was even allowed to preach at Thyatira in the name of Christ (Rv.2:20), and they arrogantly took upon themselves apostolic authority (Rv.2:2).

According to Peter, they claimed for themselves authority to teach in the churches, and prophetic and charismatic gifts. While preaching the Lord, they nevertheless denied Him in fact, despising the authority of the Church (2Pt.2:10), and they spoke against heavenly beings. Like most of the emotionalist and "ecstatic" sects of history, they ended up falling into depravity. In Ephesus in particular, they took Paul's words about "freedom in Christ" to such extremes that they, like the later Anabaptists, fell into unimaginable depravity. They falsely interpreted Paul's words about being saved by faith without works of the law in such a way that Apostle James had to write against this excess in his General Epistle.

Response to the Nikolaitans

It was, in fact, in direct response to the Nikolaitans and similar early heresies that the Apostles more clearly defined in specific canons, the hierarchical structure and order of the Church. Many of the "Apostolic Canons" were responses to this and similar heresies. The Holy Spirit firmly established the God-ordained hierarchical order and authority in the Church during the life time of the apostles. The famous epistles of our God-bearing father Ignatios of Antioch, a personal disciple of Christ who was taught and ordained by Apostle John, clearly sets forth the Apostolic order of the Church, in a direct response to such wolves as the Nikolaitans, and against all future Nikolaitans and semi-

Nikolaitans.

So you see, the truth is precisely the opposite of what your Protestant acquaintance has been led to believe. The Nikolaitans were the earliest prototypes of Protestantism itself, and the condemnation of the Nikolaitans of the last days refers to those who reject the authority of the Church's canons, councils and hierarchical structure and authority.

Seasons Of Celebration

An outstanding exhibition of Eastern Church ritual and vestments is touring Canada.

The exhibit, arranged and organized by Mr David Goa of the Provincial Museum of Alberta, is based on the relationship between the cycle of Orthodox Divine Services and the cosmic and universal cycles of nature. Mr Goa had done a superb piece of work on this exhibit, and we urge all our readers to make a point of visiting the exhibit when it comes to your area. Check with local museums and art galleries to find out when it will appear. If it is not scheduled to be displayed in your region of Canada, find out why not. This striking presentation should be seen in every part of Canada, as it deals with a very significant part of Western Canadian culture. We Orthodox Christians can be grateful that such an exhibit was arranged by so knowledgeable and qualified a researcher as Mr Goa.

We will present photographs and a review of the exhibit in the next issue of *Orthodoxy Canada/Canadian Orthodox Missionary*.



IN MEMORIAM

Vasili (T.J.) Aspinwall son of Thomas Aspinwall of Ketchikan, Alaska, fell asleep in the Lord at age 15 in April. May the Lord God remember him in His kingdom, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

Militsa Mitrovich

"Kuma Millie" departed to the Lord on 19 May. A dear friend not only to her fellow Serbs in Chicago, but to the editor of this newspaper, Kuma Millie reposed after a long illness. It is impossible to describe how much she will be missed by those of us who knew and loved her.

May God grant her the Heavenly Kingdom, and grant comfort and strength to her family to carry on without her constant guidance, love and wisdom.

The Hesychast Spirituality of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov

(by Br. Seraphim Royer)

I. Brief Hagiography

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov's writings tend to be permeated with the divine darkness, and his temperament was very melancholy, yet he is considered, for many very good reasons, the Russian hesychast par excellence. Ignatius Brianchaninov was born on February 6, 1807, a scion of a noble family from the Volgoda province, and received an excellent education as a youth. He was a very devout youth, expressing the desire to become a monk at an early age. His desire became a reality in 1831, after he had completed his studies at the Imperial School of Engineers, and he became a monk at the Semigorodsky Monastery. Later he was appointed to the Sergiev Monastery, and became its abbot in 1834. Emperor Nicholas I was a good friend of his and visited him at the monastery frequently. On October 23, 1857, at the insistence of Emperor Alexander II, Ignatius was consecrated Bishop of the Caucasus. However, due to the extreme undisciplined state of that diocese, Ignatius' delicate health declined and on October 13, 1861 the Synod accepted his petition of resignation, whereupon he retired to the Nikolo-Babaev Monastery as its abbot. He produced most of his literary works in the last two years of his life, and died on April 30, 1867.

II. Theology of Synergy

Of the nineteenth century Russian hesychasts, Bishop Ignatius' writings are the most speculative. Although his writings are much like Theophan's, they tend to be more esoteric in nature. The Arena, which was an ascetical work that he addressed primarily to monks, emphasizes the supreme importance of having a life pleasing to God precede a life of hesychia, and throughout the work Ignatius exhorts the monks he addresses that the spiritual life is one of synergy between human effort and divine Grace, and the life in Christ consists in harmoniously coordinating human freedom and divine Grace in a symphonic action, a manner wherein both operate fully without contradiction or confusion. His teaching to this regard exactly corresponds with that of St Gregory Palamas, and is really a commentary on the latter. Yet his work is not a simple repetition, for although Palamas worked out the theology of synergy, carefully avoiding the extremities of Pelagius and Augustine, it was Ignatius who creatively interpreted this theology with such a clarity and simplicity that the theology of synergy became the classic Orthodox teaching on the relation between freedom and Grace, and carefully augmented monastic spirituality, which depends heavily on human effort in asceticism, without falling prey to the danger of undercutting the necessity of divine Grace.

III. Three Degrees of Prayer

Like Theophan, Ignatius held that there are three degrees of prayer: of the mind, of the heart, and of the soul. According to Ignatius, prayer of the mind is when prayer is recited with "profound attention" and is in "sympathy with the heart." Prayer of the heart is when the mind is united with the heart in prayer, when "the mind descends as it were into the heart, and sends up the prayer from its depths." Finally, prayer of the soul is when the "whole soul," which includes the participation of the body, offers prayer from the whole of its being, and the soul acts as the "mouthpiece of prayer."

To support his analysis, Ignatius quotes from St Gregory of Sinai: "Thus Gregory Sinai said: 'Cry out unceasingly with the mind, or with the soul.'" We can readily see here the integration of Palamas' insistence on the participation

of the whole man in prayer, and the influence of St Nicephorus the Hagiote, in which prayer is ideally when the mind descends into the heart, and the body participates as well (e.g., the psycho-physical method of hesychasm). Yet Ignatius is creative here as well, for his arrangement is not hierarchical like that of Theophan the Recluse. Moreover, again the theme of symphonious action is paramount here, yet this theme is in perfect accord with Palamas' theory regarding the whole man. He also adds his own contribution of the soul as the mouthpiece of the whole man. Therefore, although he makes creative contributions, Ignatius' theory is faithful to the fourteenth century hesychast tradition, building on its foundations and refining it. Ignatius undertakes to evaluate the role of the breathing techniques of hesychasm (the psycho-physical method), which he ascribes to St Symeon the New Theologian and St Nicephorus the Hagiote. In his evaluation Ignatius regards the breathing techniques as useful, as assisting the mind in descending into the heart, but insists that one do so only with proper guidance, for those who attempt it of their own accord "damage their lungs and achieve nothing." The important thing is the descent of the mind into the heart, and whether it is accomplished with or without breathing techniques is relatively unimportant. The breathing techniques are a simple device to be used, and are not absolutely necessary for the efficacy of the spiritual exercise.

IV. The Jesus Prayer

The hesychast spirituality of Ignatius embraces both the beginnings and final form of hesychasm. In his counsel for the beginners in his work on the Jesus Prayer, Ignatius recommends that the beginner follow the advice given by St. John Climacus, that through obedience and detachment the beginning hesychast will arrive at safe and satisfactory results, and that the collection of one's thoughts is the primary concern for the contemplative at this stage (most of the classic mystics start their spiritual lives with this recollection of thoughts, which trains the mind of the contemplative for the quietude and the contemplation that will come later). Indeed, Ignatius insists that he who prays without distraction constrains the heart, and that proper prayer "of the lips" will eventually and naturally lead to mental prayer, which will in turn lead to prayer of the heart. Above all, one should avoid unnatural haste in the process. According to Ignatius, the method described by St. John Climacus will lead to a fire descending into the heart, which will revivify prayer. Consequently, the mind will begin to delight in the remembrance of Jesus and contemplation of His name. Proceeding forth from this foundation, Ignatius undertakes to discuss the teaching of St. Gregory of Sinai. Regarding the latter's thought, Ignatius speaks of the Jesus Prayer, which should be repeated continually, and that the practitioner should bow his head (the seat of the mind) to the chest (the seat of the heart), restraining one's respiration, so as to accomplish this descent of the mind into the heart. Ignatius lays great emphasis on the fact that Gregory of Sinai says that this must be done with great contrition and humility, because the prayer is the "mental action of the Holy Spirit." Ignatius says that Gregory of Sinai integrates the method of St. John Climacus, but on a level for the more proficient in hesychia. Ignatius interprets Gregory of Sinai's assertion that the prayer is always accompanied by painfulness that the "painfulness" is the pain associated with contrition and weeping of the heart, the mourning of the spirit over its sins. By this way, the contemplative takes heaven by force, through his patience and perseverance. Ignatius, following this analysis, then proceeds to examining the teachings of

St. Nicephorus the Hagiote. Ignatius very enthusiastically notes that St. Nicephorus taught that hesychasm was a science of prayer which infuses the practitioner with the Spirit of God, and that mental prayer is the highest science in theology. Ignatius then at length accounts Nicephorus' teaching of the psycho-physical method, and interprets the breathing exercises as being helpful because the lungs physically surround the organ of the heart. He thinks the method is excellent, but should be practiced gradually.

V. Conclusion

Thus, Ignatius' teaching of the Jesus Prayer relies very heavily on St John Climacus and the fourteenth century sources of the hesychast spirituality—namely, St. Gregory of Sinai and St. Nicephorus the Hagiote. Yet Ignatius, typically, is never simply content to just quote the older authorities, but always adds his own creative interpretations of what they said, such as his way of dealing with Gregory of Sinai's "pain" and Nicephorus' breathing techniques (which force the mind and prayer into the heart because the lungs surround the heart, thus the breath carries the prayer down into the heart. Ignatius also makes a play on words with the "spirit" being housed in the heart and the relation of respiration etymologically with "spirit"). Therefore, Ignatius performed the service for his Russian readers of not just simply transmitting the fourteenth century hesychast spirituality, important though this might be, but of also interpreting the tradition for them. In this capacity, future generations of Orthodox contemplatives will always be in debt to him.

Footnotes:

1. Sergius Bolshakoff, Russian Mystics, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications; 1977), pp.144-145.
2. Ibid., p. 148.
3. Ibid., pp. 148-149.
4. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, The Arena, (Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery; 1972, 1983), Translation by the V. Rev. Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, pp. 14-15.
5. Igumen Chariton, The Art of Prayer, Translation by E. Kadloubovsky and E.M. Palmer, (London: Faber & Faber; 1966), p. 188.
6. Ibid., p. 104.
7. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, On The Prayer of Jesus, Translation by the V. Rev. Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, (London: Watkins; 1952), pp. 50-51, 65.
8. Ibid., pp. 74-76.

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- Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, The Arena, (Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery; 1972, 1983), Translation by the V. Rev. Archimandrite Lazarus Moore.
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FEATURE SERIES: HOMILIES ON MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Rt. Rev Archimandrite Lazar Puhalo

IV THIRD CHAPTER OF MATTHEW

"In those days, John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea."

The Evangelist has only just told us of the Christ Child being taken to Nazareth, and we know that John did not begin to preach until nearly thirty years later. Why then does Matthew say, "in those days", as if John appeared almost at the time of Christ's birth?

Because the chronologies and time frames given in the Holy Scripture are frequently symbolic, figurative or literary devices. We have only to look at the famous "six days of creation and Sabbath" and the often confusing use of the expression "a thousand" in Scripture to understand this. In the creation narrative, Scripture does not at all speak of a "first day", but it says "one day": "evening and morning were one day" (Gn.1:5). This is said because of the mystical significance of this and of the seventh day in the coming of Christ and our redemption. For, the Sabbath being a day of rest signifies not only the completion of the process of creation, but also the "resting" of Christ in the tomb. And the day which follows the Sabbath that was fulfilled by Christ is not the "first day of the week," but the eighth day of creation, since the redemption of mankind is truly the final stage in the creation of God's Kingdom. In six days, God created all things. During the several thousand years of the "seventh day," He prepared man for His Kingdom. On the "Eight Day," He redeemed His creation. Pascha was the eighth day of creation. The "Lord's day," the "Sunday" upon which we celebrate our Divine Liturgy is not really the "first day of the week". It is the mystical "eighth day," upon which the Kingdom of God is truly manifested and man is united with God.

So too, our own "Sabbath" is the day of our own repose, when we rest from all our works and end our struggle for salvation. We arise, not on "the first day", but on the eighth, eternal day. Thus, when Scripture refers to the beginning of creation as "one day", rather than "the first day", it shows the mystical significance of the day which, after the Resurrection of Christ, will become the eighth day of creation, the mystical eighth day of the week.

Likewise, when the Scripture speaks of the "days" of creation, the rationalistic mind of man thinks in terms of twenty-four hour periods, whereas the God-bearing mind of the fathers understood more perfectly, being enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and St Basil the Great plainly says:

"Whether you call it 'day', or whether you call it 'aeon', you express the same idea" (HEXAMERON, 2:8).

The term "thousand," as in "the thousand year reign" is not so much symbolic as figurative. It only signifies a great length of time, and the term "thousand" is used this way often in Hebrew writing.

Thus, St Matthew says, "In those days," referring to the fullness of time in the order of God's will and the beginning of the public preaching of the Gospel.

"And this John had clothing made of camel hair and a leather cinch around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey."

"The servant," as our Saviour says, "is not greater than his master". The King of Glory, the Salvation of all creation, appeared in humility in the manger. To those whose hearts were truly open, the King of the Heavenly Kingdom was made known. Now, the forerunner of the Gospel, the one sent to prepare for Christ's ministry, appears in similar humility, a true monk, clad in the clothing given to Adam when he was driven from Paradise, the skins of animals. John stood in the wilderness, the highest of all the sons of fallen Adam, for, "among those born of woman, there is no greater prophet than John the Baptist" (Lk.7:28). The "Old Adam" in the person of his highest son, stands at the gates of Paradise, crying out, "Repent! For the Kingdom is at hand." Repent! For the gates which closed behind our first father, clad as I am, leaving him in the sinful wilderness, are about to be re-opened. Prepare yourselves for the opening of these gates that we might re-enter, that we might receive the King and inherit once more our ancient fatherland. The Old Adam cries out and heralds the coming of the New Adam (1Cor.15:45; Eph.4:22-24).

Notice, too, how salvation and the heralding of salvation come in humility and abasement — as Christ wrapped in swaddling cloths, and John clad in coarse skins, not in finery, but in clothing strange to the masses of the people, humorous and "out of date", like some throw-back to primitive times — like some true Orthodox priest clad in beard, long hair and cassock, "out of date", like something from the "primitive Church".

Truly, no one can receive salvation unless he first strips himself of finery and pride, of concern with being "up to date", and robes his soul in simplicity and humility. Salvation of the soul, the Kingdom of Heaven are for the simple, the humble, the "out of date". They come to those who open the door of their hearts to Christ through repentance, only to find that He opens in their hearts the gates to Paradise.

"Then, people from Jerusalem and from all over Judea and the region along the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins...But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said to them...therefore bring forth worthy fruits of repentance" (3:5-8).

Those who came confessing their sins, John freely baptized, but those who came arrogantly, from curiosity, exalting themselves as "sons of Abraham," he turned away, calling upon them to bring forth the fruits of repentance, namely, contrition of heart and humility of spirit, "for a contrite heart and a humble spirit, God will not turn away" (Ps.51). Those who came arrogantly, without repentance, only brought harm and greater condemnation upon themselves by approaching that baptism, and so John warns them beforehand to bring forth the fruits of repentance, whereas, those who came with sincere contrition and humility bore these fruits in their hearts already.

"I baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that will come after me...shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (3:11).

John baptized unto repentance, as Chrysostom says, and not "for remission of sins". In this, we have another revelation about our salvation. For Christ is ever near and ever ready to appear in our hearts and redeem us from the power of the evil-one. But one thing is needful from us: precisely, repentance. Repentance is nothing else but a sincere desire to have ourselves and our nature redeemed from the world of sin, from the power of Satan. On the very eve of the appearance of Christ to open the Gospel of salvation, the Baptist comes to prepare those who will be saved, to rouse up in them that contrition and change of heart which will allow them to receive Christ. Baptism "for remission of sin" came only with Christ, because He is Himself the remission of sins, as no one else could bear away the sin of the world. This is the very meaning of the prophecy from Isaiah, "prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight," about which our beloved father Chrysostom speaks much.

We understand already the meaning of the words, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire," because we recall that when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church, It came in the form of fiery tongues, symbolizing the purifying power of the Gospel which the disciples would preach, and also, how the Gospel would "set the world on fire".

"Whose winnowing fan is in His hand and he shall thoroughly purge his winnowing floor and gather his wheat into His granary; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (3:12).

From the very beginning, we learn that Christ came, not as a force which would unify all mankind, but as a stone of offence and a stumbling stone (Is.8:14; Rm.9:33) and a sword dividing mankind asunder unto all eternity (Mt.10:34-38; Hb.4:12; Rev.1:6; 19:15, 21). It is not that God wills man to be divided, rather He "wills that all should turn and be saved" (1Tm.2:4). Christ came showing that truth is absolute and perfect, and man must now choose absolutely whether to struggle toward that truth or reject it and separate himself from it, and from God for all eternity. God willed that all mankind should gather to His Son and become citizens of His Kingdom, but instead, Herod became a murderer, the Pharisees persecutors, the scribes, devious liars. Christ is a stone of division among men not because He wishes man to be divided, but because His appearance, life and sacrifice has forced each human person to make a clear choice of his own free will, as soon as he hears the Gospel. The Cross itself is a sword which divides mankind firmly and forever. This is precisely what is taught by the two thieves. The Cross did not at all unite the two men, rather it separated them as far as heaven is from hell. They were not divided by the qualities of their lives, by their moral or good and bad deeds. They were separated by a clear choice of will and faith, by accepting or rejecting that absolute truth of Christ and His Kingdom. When the one cried out, "Remember me in Your Kingdom," he already entered into the Church, being assured that he would ascend now from the earthly (militant) Church to the heavenly.

It is a tragic error of many modern sophists, primarily those of the "Ecumenical Movement" and World Council of Churches, to assert that Christ appeared to create a "world brotherhood of mankind", a "universal brotherhood". Nothing of this sort is even hinted at in the Holy Scripture. Indeed, every leader or movement which has appeared as a force to unite mankind and form a universal brotherhood has inevitably turned out to be a brutal, vicious force, a homicidal dictatorship which has slaughtered and tortured every dissenting person and persecuted every dissenting idea. The same is true of every force which has used Christ's name to create a "unified mankind". Every force which claims to bring about a unity, equality and brotherhood of all men, begins as a benevolent movement laced with exalted slogans, but ends as a force of brutal, conscienceless repression. Such movements do not, cannot, approach the root of all divisions, the fallen and divided human nature. Instead, they must resort to force, trying to crush and force the fallen nature into a standardized mold. Such was the French Revolution, with its "Equality and Fraternity", the National Socialist Party and Communism. Such would the Ecumenical Movement become if it gained any form of political power, and such, of course, will be the reign of Antichrist.

Christ came to give man a free choice, and that free choice, that self determined act of conscience separates man, the redeemed from the rejecters of redemption. The winnowing fan of Christ is His Gospel, His Truth. Once that absolute truth of Christ was manifested, that completed Gospel of salvation revealed, the true "nature" of God made known, every person becomes either wheat or chaff, not by any predestining of God, but by a free act of their own will and conscience. The preaching of John and his baptizing "unto repentance" immediately before the appearance of Christ with His "winnowing fan in His hand" makes this clear enough.

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by him. But John declined Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?' And Jesus answered, 'Tolerate this now, for it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness...'" (3:13-15)

See how Christ comes everywhere in humility, not with processions and honour, nor with self-exaltation or "according to rank" -- po chinu --? Even when He worked His greatest miracles, He did not send heralds or announcements to gather people to honour His works. His miracles poured forth from pure love and as revelations, and those who happened to be near by -- some by coincidence, others, perhaps, by God's will -- witnessed them. These miracles, these acts of pure Divine love also became stones of division, for some believed because of them while others hated Him because of them. His very meekness and humility were sources of hatred and malice to the proud and arrogant. Let us say, then, that while Christ is a stone of offence and His cross a sword of division, it is not God Who brings about division in man, rather it is the reaction of the conscience and free-will of each separate person, confronted with the reality of God's presence.

As God, Christ had called and sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of redemption, to inaugurate baptism as the beginning of the process of each person's salvation, and since He has taken on our human nature, He fulfils also the plan for the redemption of that nature. Since man cannot fulfil righteousness himself, Christ God has come as a man to fulfil all righteousness for man, so that man, by joining himself to Christ may appropriate that righteousness to himself, as the Scripture elsewhere says:

"...one righteous act [dikaionomatos] brought righteousness [dikaiosin] of life to all mankind," and "He was delivered [to death] for our sins, and raised to life for our [to bestow upon us] righteousness" (Rm.5:18; 4:25).

"And when Jesus had been baptized, He immediately went up out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened upon Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him" (3:16).

What need had He Who created the heavens that they should open to Him, or He Who is of one Essence with the Spirit that It should now descend upon Him? He had no such need, of course, but since in His human nature He was baptized, He inaugurated, as Chrysostom says, the true baptism of the Church. Thus, at the beginning and prototype of the Orthodox baptism, we receive a revelation of what actually takes place at every Orthodox baptism: for the heavens open not only on Him, and the Spirit descends not only on Him, but upon every new born soul which rises up from the waters of holy baptism. Thus this vision revealed to us beforehand what is now common to the Holy Church. Yet, it could not be so if the Perfect Man had not brought it to pass. But there is more: since this miracle occurred first of all to Christ, and only then to the fallen nature, it teaches us that it is by Christ, through Christ and because of Christ that man becomes once more a participant in the Divine, that man is restored to communion with the life of the Godhead. These things, then, Christ brought to pass when He transformed baptism from a type into a fulfilled and living Holy Mystery.

"And lo, a voice came from heaven saying, 'This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well-pleased'" (3:17)

This voice echoes down from the dawn of creation, "Let us make man in Our Own image and likeness." And now it says, "Let us restore man to Our Own image and likeness," or rather, "We have now re-created man in Our Own image and likeness."

Was it not thus from the very beginning, that the Father spoke and sent forth His Word, the Son, and His Spirit. And the Son fulfilled the deed, bestowing the Spirit upon it from the Father? So the Father has spoken now. Formerly, He said, "Let us create," and now, "Let us redeem." Now, as then, it is the beloved Son who fulfils, bringing the Spirit of God down to man from the Father. This re-creating and bestowing of the Holy Spirit is accomplished in us precisely through the mystery of Holy Baptism.

There is something yet more wonderful in this. Just as the heavens open and the Spirit descends upon us, too, at baptism, there we may also hear the voice of the Father saying, not to Christ only, but even to us through Him: "This is My beloved child in whom I am well pleased." For, baptism is no less than a rite of adoption whereby we become truly children of God, re-born into the very Body of His co-eternal Son.

This vision described in Scripture is, then, not only a revelation of the Trinity and the Person of Christ, which is well evidenced everywhere, but it is a profound revelation about the nature of salvation itself and the very heart of the mystery of baptism.

A History of the African Orthodox Church

by Fr. Moses Muxura

11

The Orthodox Christian Youth Association of Kenya

The youth movement began early in 1966, but the structure which this organization would take was no one's idea. The organization was supposed to have been an association of youth united to develop leadership and Christian qualities in themselves and in others for the purpose of Christianizing the nation. In this way, everyone had a chance to develop to a greater extent. The young people who were of this association, had goals to achieve in life, home, school and within their parishes.

In January 1966, members of various parishes met at St Eleftherios' Church at Riron Parish to elect leaders and to write down their objectives, regulations, etc. Letters had been sent to every Orthodox parish within the Central and Rift Valley Provinces, inviting each parish to send representatives to this meeting. Four hundred young people, accompanied by their priests, were recorded in that meeting, seven people were elected. Father Demetrios became the chairman, Mr Polikarp (now Fr Gerasimos) became vice-chairman, and Moses Mugo wa Chege became general secretary. Mr Simon Njenga from Mukui parish was elected treasurer, and Miss Ann Elizabeth Wambui became recording secretary. Miss Zipporah Wanjiru became assistant treasurer, and Mr Costas Vasiloupoulos, a Greek missionary, was elected as a special advisor to the association.

On January 14, 1966, another meeting was held at Muguga Parish. At this meeting, other committee members were elected and the program for the association was arranged. Leaders went on to ask the local parish youth groups to write their own objectives. As a result of this meeting, the general committees were formed, comprising the office holders and two representatives from each parish within Gikuyuland.

From January, 1966, to January, 1967, many meetings were called and various youth activities were organized. As long as Father Demetrios was the chairman, the organization continued to grow and meet the needs of our youth. However, Fr Demetrios had to leave for Greece for studies. To meet the demand for funds, the general committee moved to raise the membership fee from one shilling (14c) to five shillings (US 75c) per month. It was hoped that, if the dues would be acceptable to the general public, the needs (with supplementary funds from Archimandrite Chrysostomos) would be met. Other plans were to organize activities that would raise funds, as well as holding sales of some kind.

When Father Demetrios left, all these plans could not be carried on. Mr Polikarp, who took the chairmanship, was less effective. Furthermore, the coming of the new Metropolitan and the departure of Archimandrite Chrysostomos all affected his position, and he became unable to carry on his duties as chairman. Mr Vasiloupoulos was also expelled by the Metropolitan, causing the publicity that he was giving to the association in Greece to decline. Many other things caused the association to fail, but the main ones were: (a) lack of leadership at all levels and, (b) many leaders lacked the knowledge and preparation of being leaders of such an organization.

Without the knowledge of their place in life, and without an aim within the organization, the organization as a group became a miserable experience and unworthy of the effort to be part of it. Many of the leaders lacked initiative and dedication, but above all, the new Metropolitan who was supposed to take the role of a leader in a developing Church lacked the same thing. He lacked the initiative to see the need, to think and to plan how the organization could continue being the place for young Africans within the Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Nikodemos lacked the dedication to the African Orthodox Church, something the Church needed in order to grow and develop.

In summary, the Metropolitan failed the youth due to these factors: (a) inability to organize a group, (b) failure to accept responsibility and, finally (c) the inability to influence people. Although the Youth Association was a short-lived movement, there were a few accomplishments within it. In such a short time, young people were able to learn to devote themselves and to work in a group -- something important to all parishes.

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