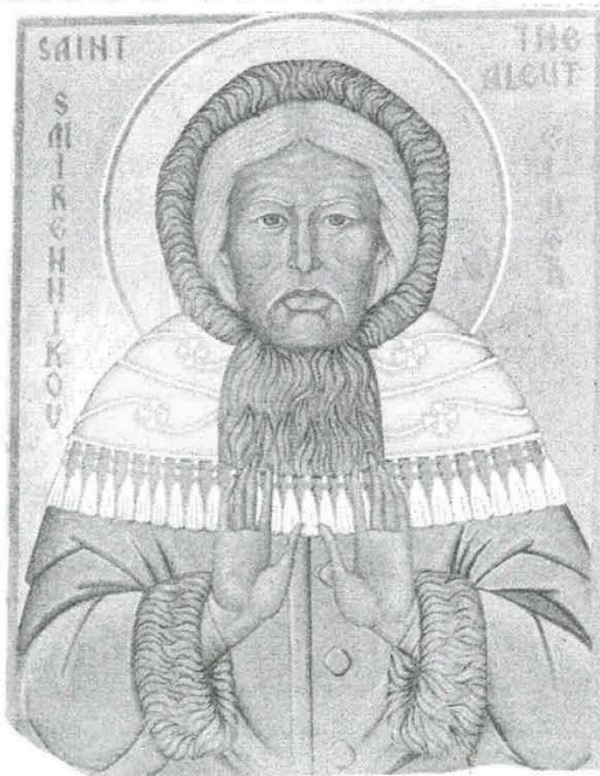




THE CANADIAN ORTHODOX MISSIONARY



THE ALEUT ELDER SMIRENNIKOV
(Ikon painted in Serbia for the Monastery of All Saints of North America)



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Diocesan News	.1
Bishop's Page (On The Divine Liturgy) ..	.3
The New World Paterikon (Elder Smirennikov)	.5
Svetosavle Sermons (Fr Djuro Krosnjar)	.7
Augustine of Hippo: An Orthodox perspective ..	.8
What The Bible is Not	12
Readings with Reader Nicholas (Book review column)	14
New Book Announcements (Church School Text)	17
Children's Corner	18
Canadian Orthodox Reader .	19

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EDITORIAL STAFF

Fr Moses Armstrong, Editor
Reader Nicholas Franck
Michel Delaunay

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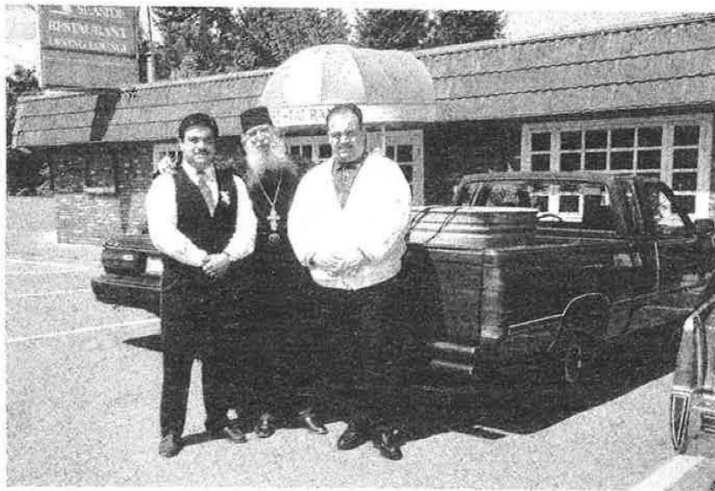
{May/June, 1994: PAGE 1}

UTAH SOCIAL WORKER OF THE YEAR: MEREDITH FRANCK EARNS AWARD

Meredith Franck, wife of Reader Nicholas Franck was recently recognized for her outstanding and compassionate contribution to the social service system in Utah state. Her now famous "Chance" programme, which she created to help the poor and socially impaired learn to effectively communicate their needs and suffering, has been adopted and published by the State of Utah. Her work in social services has been characterized by compassion and understanding, and an ability to obtain positive results. We congratulate Meredith on her achievement, but most of all we are edified by her love and compassion and the evident way in which her life is guided by the principles of our Orthodox faith.



NEW LIFE: BAPTISMS IN THE DIOCESE



Bishop Lazar with portable baptismal font, in Royston, B.C.

For the past twenty-five years, Bishop Lazar has served a unique ministry in the Orthodox Church. He has travelled all over North America, to villages, isolated farms and small towns, serving isolated Orthodox Christians. Sometimes he has visited a single family on a remote farm to serve and bring Holy Communion to the family, or travelled to a small community with a baptismal font in the back of the monastery truck to baptize an infant or an adult, or even, on two occasions, entire families. Baptisms and weddings have been served in meadows, living rooms and even in restaurants. "Practically

none of these people will ever belong to, or contribute anything to my diocese," Vladika says, "but that is not the point. Orthodox Christians who wish to keep their faith and who wish to have their baptisms and marriages sanctified by the Church should not be ignored just because they do not have

{PAGE 2: May/June, 1994}

money, or because they live in a community too small to support an Orthodox Church. We accepted the grace of the priesthood to serve the people of God and no other consideration can possibly enter our minds when the people have needs or desire to have their faith supported."

In the photo above, Bishop Lazar is shown in Royston, B.C., with members of the Apostolakos family, standing by the monastery truck with the adult baptismal font in the back. Deborah Ann Apotolakos and her son Antony were baptized in the restaurant of her parents-in-law in May this year. Below, Deborah Ann Apostolakos reads the Symbol of Faith in preparation for baptism. Her one year old son Antony, who was baptised with her, is behind the bishop.



MISSION, B.C.:

Nathan James Wozny was baptised on 14 May, in the monastery church. Nathan is the first child for Kim and Melanie Wozny. Shown below with the parents, godmother Angie McLleland holds Nathan, and godfather Dion Lochhead holds the cross and candles.

The Woznys are members of Saint Nicholas Canadian Orthodox Church in Langley, B.C.



THE BISHOP'S PAGE
by Bishop Lazar Puhalo

THE CYCLE OF ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN
DIVINE SERVICES

THE DIVINE LITURGY

"Thou shalt make two cherubim of hammered gold, at the two ends of the mercy seat."

"Moreover, thou shalt form the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely woven linen, blue and purple and scarlet: thou shalt weave them with cherubim of fine craftsmanship" (Ex.25:18; 26:1)

When God caused Moses to build the tabernacle in the wilderness, He commanded that *the walls of the temple be covered with interwoven ikons of cherubim*, and that hammered metal ikons of the cherubim be placed on either end of the ark of the covenant, overshadowing the "mercy seat" on the ark. Why was this done? Precisely to reveal to the Hebrews that, in the tabernacle, heaven had truly come down to earth, that God Himself would commune and fellowship with His people in the tabernacle (Ex.25:22). The ikons of the heavenly beings proclaimed that heaven was, in a manner, revealed by the tabernacle, and that the rule and reign of God was manifested in the holy place.

It is for just this reason that the walls of Orthodox Christian churches are covered with ikons of those who have been fully glorified and become partakers of the rule and reign of God (the "kingdom" of heaven). When we enter an Orthodox church and see the ikons of the saints and angels on the walls, we receive exactly the same message the priests received when they entered the tabernacle in the wilderness: here, God has manifested Himself. Here, heaven has truly come down to earth, for God, Who is always with us, Who is "everywhere present," has

uniquely manifested Himself in His Church. In the church, in the Divine Liturgy, the reign and rule of God are manifested, and He especially communes and fellowships with us in the mutual worship and Mystery of Holy Communion. It is important for us to have this understanding of the ikons which God commanded for His tabernacle when He gave the law of His "Old Testament," and which the Holy Spirit has revealed to His "New Testament" Church, if we are to fully understand the Divine Liturgy and the typikon.¹

"To enlighten all men and make plain to them what is the mystery kept hidden and concealed until now in God Who created all things by Christ Jesus. That through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known" (Eph.3:9-10).

Nowhere is the mystery of salvation made so profoundly and concisely clear as in the Divine Liturgy. The Liturgy is a truly wondrous mystery and revelation. In it, the whole message and mystery of salvation is presented in such a way that the faithful spiritually participate in the whole life and saving work of Christ. Indeed, the inner purpose of the Orthodox Liturgy is to make the worshippers on earth participants in the eternal worship in heaven. This in itself provides one with the basic means to understand the Scripture. For, the Sacred Tradition which has shaped the litanies, hymns and rubrics of the Liturgy has in this way preserved and explicated that original apostolic revelation, that original Christian life and understanding which underlies and precedes the New Testament Scripture itself. In truth, the Liturgy was the first recorded form of the Gospel.

The Divine Liturgy was instituted by Christ Himself at His Mystic Supper before His arrest and crucifixion. The core prayers and basic actions of the Liturgy were handed down to us by the Apostles, especially by James, Mark and

1. It may become evident, as we study the Divine Liturgy, that the so-called "Western Rite," really is bankrupt as an expression of the Orthodox Faith, that it is a mere emotional contrivance with no means of expressing Orthodox revelation and spirituality.

Matthew. Thus, in its essence, the Liturgy concisely expresses the Gospel as the Apostles and first Christians received it directly from Christ, and understood it themselves. When the Evangelists later wrote the four Gospels for the sake of those who had not known Christ personally, they provided a more complete historical record of Christ's teachings, deeds and life, and of the apostolic doctrine. Nevertheless, the Liturgy, as the living expression of worship which binds the earthly and the heavenly Church together, remains the repository of that essential understanding and revelation which gives firm support to and explanation of the Gospels. Part of the mystery of the Liturgy is this quality of penetrating directly to the heart of the Gospel and drawing forth its essence and meaning in clear, concise, visible and spiritually elevating terms. When the Liturgy and Scripture are compared together, we begin to grasp this mystery.

The Divine Liturgy, like the Holy Scripture, is received on different levels by different people. Orthodox Christians are expected to be constantly struggling to grow spiritually into an ever greater and more rich understanding and experience of both the Liturgy and the Scripture. To the spiritually immature, the Scripture and Liturgy are seen, first as historical documents, and secondly as inspirational literature and poetry and, at a higher level, as a record of divine truths. At this level, one can draw much moral and philosophical edification from them. But as one rises beyond this level, one becomes truly a participant in divine mysteries, a participant in the grace of God and a recipient of the Holy Spirit. The Divine Liturgy has the power, by God's grace, to truly unite one with the life and saving work of Christ, and with the worship of the Trinity being celebrated in the Heavenly Kingdom, before the very throne of God.

We are not dealing, in this work, with a "science of liturgical theology," in the scholastic sense. This work is written only to demonstrate the spiritual content of the Liturgy and its amplification of the Holy Scripture. Ultimately, the minute points discussed in Tübingen-like textual and historical analyses of the Liturgy only

serve to confuse the faithful, not to edify them. The whole point of our approach to the understanding of the Liturgy is to come to a realization and experience of the majesty and transforming power of the Holy Spirit working through the Divine Liturgy. "Liturgical theology" really consists in coming to fully understand and experience in the depths of the soul, the meaning of the great anthem of the people of God, "Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim, and chant the thrice-holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity, lay aside all earthly cares that we may receive the King of all who comes invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia." This hymn, this anthem, proclaims so clearly the power of the grace-filled Divine Liturgy to bind and unite the people of God on earth with the angelic hosts, to bring those of us who are still earth-bound before the very throne of the living God, and unite us in spiritual and physical worship of the creator and redeemer.

Each celebration of the Divine Liturgy is an episode of divine grace, a union of God and man, of heaven and earth, the uniting of each communicant with the one Body of Jesus Christ, in which the power of death has been conquered, truly and eternally. This is the sum total of real liturgical theology.

What we desire to do here is to open before the faithful a real awareness of the spiritual content and power of the Divine Liturgy as a concelebration of the priest, the people of God and the heavenly hosts, of the effectual power of the Holy Spirit working in and bestowing grace through, the Divine Liturgy. We wish also to demonstrate the absolute bond between the Orthodox Liturgy and the Holy Scripture. If the faithful can come to a vital understanding of the Divine Liturgy in this manner, then their own lives can be changed and transformed by the living experience of true worship — worship "in spirit and in truth" — and they, in turn, being transformed by divine grace, can serve to change and transform the world around them.

(Continued in next issue.)

Excerpts From
THE NEW-WORLD PATERIKON



THE ACTS OF
THE SAINTS



HOLY ELDER SMIRENNIKOV

One of the most unusual and edifying stories in the spiritual history of Alaska concerns an Aleut elder named Smirennikov. According to some sources, his baptismal name was John, but the only certain details we have of his life are to be found in the journal of St Innokenty (Innocent) of Alaska. During the time when he was serving Kodiak and the Aleutian chain of islands, St Innokenty (then Fr John) recorded the following events:

In 1828, I travelled by bidarka to the island of Akun. It was during the Great Fast and I was going to prepare the Aleuts for Holy Communion. As I approached the shore, I saw that all the people of the village were dressed in their best clothes and gathered on the beach evidently waiting to greet me. As I got out of the bidarka I asked the meaning of this. They answered that they knew I was coming and had come to greet me and welcome me to their island. I asked them why they were lined up and how it was that they were so familiar with me. They responded, 'We knew that you had left Unalaska for this island and would be here today, and so to show our joy we came out here to welcome you.'

'Old Smirennikov told us that you had started from Unalaska and would arrive today to teach us about God and how to pray. He described your appearance just as we see you now.'

Later, I met old man Smirennikov. He was about sixty years of age. He was called a 'shaman' because he performed manifestations which the people could not understand. One of the most striking was this: one woman, the wife of Theodore Zharov, stepped on a set klipts trap

which severely injured her knee. The barbs on the lever of the trap, about two inches long, struck her knee cap, causing a very painful and dangerous wound. Blood poisoning set in and the woman was at death's door. In fact, there did not appear to be any hope for her recovery. The family of the woman called upon old Smirennikov for help. He came to see the woman and after praying over her for a short time, he announced that she would be well by morning. To everyone's surprise, by morning the woman arose from her sick bed perfectly well, with no indication of the wound or injury in her knee. Another striking incident was the help in procuring food for the whole village. During the winter of 1825, the natives of Akun Island were entirely out of food. Some of the villagers asked Smirennikov to give the people of Akun a whale so that they would not die from starvation. He said, 'I will ask for it'. A little later he came and announced that if they would go to a certain beach on the island, they would find the whale they had asked for. All went to the site and found a whale on the beach.'

I spent the next while explaining the meaning of the fast and so on, preparing everyone for Holy Communion. The old man, the "shaman", appeared and expressed his desire to prepare himself for the Mysteries. He used to come regularly; nevertheless, I did not pay special attention to him and at the time of the confession I even failed to ask him why the people called him shaman.

After I gave him the Holy Mysteries, he departed, and to my surprise, he complained to the Toyon (the chief or prince of his tribe) that I had not asked him in confession why the Aleuts called him "shaman", inasmuch as it would be a sin to practice shamanism, and he was not at all happy that the congregation called him this.

The Toyon related this to me, and I immediately sent for Smirennikov to set the matter aright. Smirennikov was already on his way to me and he told the messenger, 'I know that Fr John is calling for me, and I am going to him.'

My desire was to know how he could know certain events ahead of time and by what means

he cured illness. He told me the following:

'Shortly after I was baptized by Fr Makary, first one and then two men appeared to me. They were not visible to others, but I could see and talk to them and they were dressed like the ikons in church (the Archangels).'

These angels told the old man that they were sent there by God to teach the people and to guard them. Over the past thirty years, these angels appeared to him almost daily. They instructed him in the tenets of Christianity and the mysteries of the Orthodox Faith. It is not necessary to repeat all that he said on the subject, for what he said were really the teachings of Christ.



Smirennikov, the Aleut Elder

These angels rendered to him, and through him to other people, help in time of illness, distress and trouble. But the angels always said that they would ask God and if He willed to help, the help would be received. Occasionally, he would acquaint the people with events in other remote places. He very seldom foretold coming events. In this, the angels without fail told him that what they told him was not of their own power, but came from God.

I asked him, 'How do they teach you to pray? Do they want you to bow to them and to pray to them?' He replied, 'They teach me to pray to God alone; to pray in spirit and from a pure heart. They often prayed together with me for long periods.'

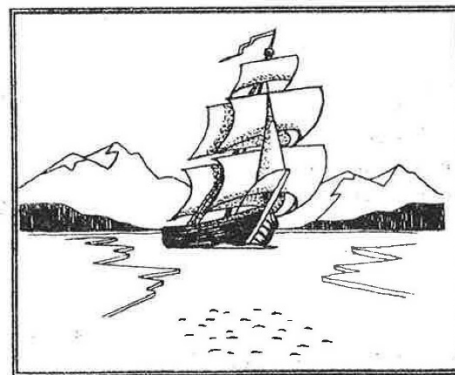
I gave him the following instructions: 'I can plainly see that the angels who visit you are good angels and you must follow their teachings. If anyone asks you for help, you must tell them to pray to God themselves. God is our Father, and He will help those who put their trust in Him. I do not, however, forbid you to render help to those who are ill, but be sure that you explain to them that it is not you who gives help, but God by His almighty power'.

Fr John was very much interested in this wonderful manifestation. He wanted to meet the good angels and talk with them, and the old man said, "I will ask them about this, and if they are willing, I shall tell you." The next day, the old man came to Fr John and told him that the angels had agreed.

"Thinking it over," Fr John continued, "I concluded that I wanted to see them out of curiosity and that if I did see them, I might become proud of this honour. I decided to report the matter to the bishop and ask for his advice."

It was a year before Fr John received a reply from the bishop, who advised him to see these angels. When the priest came to the island again, Elder Smirennikov was dead.

(Continued)



SVETOSAVLE:
SERMONS BY V. REV FR DJURO KROSINJAR

"WHY DOES GOD NOT PREVENT WAR?"

Why does God not prevent war? We begin our search for an understanding in the place where we find the surest answers to the numerous questions that trouble us; we turn to the Holy Scripture.

Why is there war? We are told that the time for war comes when evil, accumulating like pus under a boil, bursts. As the wise Solomon instructs, *"There is a time of war and a time of peace"* (Eccles. 3:8). Indeed, even though it is true that *"wisdom is better than the weapons of war"* (Eccles. 9:18) the time comes, it seems, when wisdom gets trampled and peaceful discourse fails to bring about reason. Other means then become necessary to bring about reason. As our folk proverb muses: *"Do not fear the worthless idols, but rather fear a beating."*

For a long time now our Serbian people found themselves surrounded by enemies who have fought to bury us in the dusty pages of history books. Without our steadfast resistance, that would be our destiny. We would be significant only to those scholars who today meditate about the vanished Aztec and Inca tribes, who over half a millennium ago were taken captive and destroyed by the pitiless hand of the Vatican. We Serbs find ourselves much as King David once did when he grieved:

My soul is among lions: and I lie even among those who are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongues a sharp sword (Ps. 57:4).

Although I have read David's lament before, I could not fully perceive the depth of his truthful words about the tongue being a sharp sword. Now, however, I understand the extent to which

the slaughtering tongue of the experienced Vatican machinery mercilessly wields that sharp sword. Later, the same holy prophet of God prays to God to deliver him from the despotism of evil:

... who imagine mischief in their heart; continually are they gathered for war. They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips (Ps. 140:1-3).

Why does not God prevent war? Our great bishop, St Nikolai of Zhicha, poses an analogous question when he asks: *"Why does not the town physician prevent illness?"* Well, the physician begins by suggesting the nourishment and life style required to prevent illness. When the illness has set in, however, the physician prescribes both nutrition and medicine. By prescribing the nourishment and medicine, the physician makes the remedy available. With that, the physician has done his part to combat the illness, but if the people receive the prescription from the physician and ignore it, who is at fault? Is it the physician or the citizens of the town? Certainly it is not the fault of the physician. Similarly, we cannot fault God for the existence of war. God has given us a detailed prescription that, if followed, prevents war. That prescription is found in the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, people have received that preventative but have ignored it. Who then is at fault? Certainly not God.

When humans substitute God's law with their own rules, God's will with their own human will, and God's reason with human rationality, then war must come. Although the power of God certainly could prevent every war just as a driver halts a car by applying the brakes, God does not act toward man as toward dumb objects incapable of choice. God will not push man by force onto the good path, concludes Saint Nikolai.

In like manner we carry the burden of how to balance the Christian call to love our enemies (Mt. 5:44) with the exigencies of war. We cannot justify the infliction of evil committed by our own people. Any action which transgresses the

bounds of a defence of life itself returns upon us as an even greater evil. But, our search for an answer to this troubling question is aided by one who has instructed us in the way of Christianity — St Cyril. When Muslims asked St Cyril: *"How is it that Christians can war and at the same time hold to the commandment to pray for their enemies?"* St Cyril answers thus: *"If a man is given two orders to execute within one law, which man shall be the better executant of the law: the one who fulfils only one order or the one who fulfils both?"* *"Undoubtedly the one who fulfils both"* answered the Saracen. St Cyril continued: *"Christ our God commanded us to pray for those who hatefully pursue us and to act well toward them. But He also told us that we cannot have a greater act of love in this world than laying down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13). Therefore, we withstand the insults our enemies hurl at us as individuals. For them, we pray. But as a community we stand behind one another laying down our lives so that our enemies will not be able to plunder our brothers, seize their bodies and souls, and execute them in body and spirit."*

Our people have risen to defend their very existence in the face of the onslaught of the evil and selfishness of this world. Our enemies have skilfully created a strangling, binding situation in which to ensnare us, and we have no choice but to loose ourselves from their shackles. We believe that God is with those who defend their lives. He is their protection.

May the Lord protect and save us. God, grant us that the day will soon dawn when swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks; when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (Is.2:4).

Amen.



AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO:
AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

by Rev Dr Michael Azkoul

Introduction

The Orthodox Church is a church which lives by holy Tradition. This Tradition is *"the faith once delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3). Christ is the author of that Tradition, saying to His Apostles, *Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have taught you. And behold, I shall be with you always even to the end of the age* (Mt.28:20).

The most important element of Holy Tradition is the Holy Scripture, or "written tradition," as some have called this sacred and infallible book. The great teachers of and witnesses to the Church's Tradition, the supreme expositors of the Bible, are the holy Fathers. St Maximus the Confessor tells us that *"to confess with soul and mouth"* the Christian Faith is *"to affirm what the Fathers have taught us."* We believe these holy men, who belong to every generation of Orthodox, precisely because they do speak not for themselves, *"but as they are bidden by the Holy Spirit."*¹

There have been, however, Christian writers, both past and present, whom the Church does not recognize as her spokesmen, because they speak for themselves and not in testimony of the Tradition to which, in fact, all Orthodox are called to witness and defend. They were (and are) writers who have preferred their own opinions and ideas to "the faith of their fathers."

Sincerity of purpose and profundity of thought are not the question here, but humility of spirit. He who seeks to "improve" or "extend" holy Tradition is proud, a vice which the Orthodox Church has never fostered. Into this class of religious writer, falls Augustine, the fifth century bishop of Hippo (North Africa). Influenced by Greek philosophy, he hoped to

convert the Orthodox Faith into a "science" and, consequently, fell into numerous theological errors. These errors, his violations of holy Tradition, are what we will discuss here.

Such a discussion seems appropriate, since there has been much talk of Augustine in some contemporary Orthodox circles. His recognition as a saint and church father is viewed by these Orthodox in the context of Ecumenical relations, and on account of his importance to the history of both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Also, his favourable mention periodically in the literature of the Orthodox Church suggests to some of her members that Augustine of Hippo deserves a place on the patristic roll². They ignore the fact that his theology is largely responsible for the separation of the West from the Orthodox Church. "By his doctrine, writes H. Reuter, *"Augustine prepared for the separation of the East and West."*³ B.B. Warfield agrees, saying that *"it was Augustine who imprinted upon the West...a character so specific as naturally to bring the separation of the Church in its train."*⁴

One may go further: Augustine is the source of every heresy which now afflicts Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

Augustine is neither a saint nor a Church father. He is guilty of too many serious theological errors, including false ideas about God, Christ, the Church, and human nature. Also, the positive opinion of him by his Orthodox champions is an indication of faulty and unscholarly research, if indeed they have researched him at all.

LIFE

Augustine was born 12 November 354 at Tagaste (modern Souk-Ahras, Algeria) in North Africa, the Roman Province of Numidia. One of four children, his father, Patricius, was a Roman administrator. His mother, St Monica, nurtured her brood with the greatest care, and prayed constantly for the conversion of her pagan husband and family.

Apparently, Patricius made no objection to her Christian instruction of his children. Under her influence, Augustine became a catechumen,

but resisted baptism until struck with a serious illness. When the danger passed, he changed his mind about becoming Christian.

His father noticing Augustine's early academic promises, directed his son toward a legal career and spared no expense for his training. At first, he attended the local school, but later went to Madura and then Carthage. There he became involved with a woman who gave him a son, Adeodatus (who died at a young age). He did not abandon the mother of his child, but supported her for fifteen years.

During this period, he was attracted to the religion of Mani, the Persian prophet, who claimed to have received revelations from the God of Light. Mani taught that spirit is good, and matter is evil. Augustine was convinced he had the answers to all the mysteries of the universe. Throwing himself into this religion (Manicheism) with all zeal, he read its books, defended its teachings, and made many converts for it.

Augustine took a position in the North African town of Tagaste where he taught grammar. The death of a close friend caused him to return to Carthage where he lectured in rhetoric (the art of speech). Here also he wrote his first work (now lost), entitled On the Beautiful and Fitting. The subject of this work led him to question the religion of Mani, and meeting with the leader of the Manicheans, Bishop Faustus of Milevus, he came away with the impression that Faustus was neither a man of conviction nor of learning.

The young Augustine now turned his energies to the study of classical philosophy, largely under the influence of his reading of the ancient Roman writer, Cicero. To this end, he departed Africa for Rome in the year 383. St Monica followed him secretly. Disliking the atmosphere of the capital, he applied for a vacant professorship in Milan. There he saw the holy Bishop Ambrose. Augustine seems to have visited him and was evidently captivated by the hierarch's charm and piety. He attended the Liturgy at the cathedral whenever the saint celebrated the Liturgy, anxious to hear Ambrose' eloquence and wisdom.⁵

Augustine's mind was only more unsettled,

even more uncertain about the truth and where it was to be found. He turned to the Academics, a group of Roman philosophers who believed that one should not expect to find the certainty of knowledge in this life. Hoping to find comfort in this doctrine, he was greatly disappointed; it brought only further despair.

Then, in 386, he encountered the "mystic vision" of neo-Platonism. Plotinus (204-270), the founder of the "new Platonism," provided him with a profound appreciation of the spiritual world. Augustine was convinced that he had cleansed himself of his former Manicheism and Skepticism. "*Augustine was carried out of himself and seized by a new passion, a passion for (Platonic) philosophy,*" writes E. Portalie.⁶

After reading the writings of Marius Victorinus (4th century), the neo-Platonist converted to Christianity (who, incidentally, had translated the *Enneads* of Plotinus into Latin), Augustine began to rethink his own life and purpose. From Plotinus (and Victorinus), he learned that it was possible to reconcile Greek philosophy and Christianity, starting with the ideas of God and the soul. Augustine was anticipating the moment of decision.

One day he was visited by a friend who had just recently returned from Egypt. He told Augustine of St Anthony and the remarkable ascetics of the desert. Augustine was shaken to the core. Rushing from his house into the garden, he flung himself beneath a fig tree and burst into tears and prayer.

In his *Confessions*, he records that he heard a voice say, *Take up and read!* He fumbled for the volume resting on the table next to him. The text fell open to St Paul's Epistle to the Romans: *Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions to gratify the lusts of the flesh (Rm.13:13-14).*

Following this episode, Augustine withdrew from Milan with several companions to Cassisiacum, an estate near the city. He announced to the local bishop that he was a candidate for baptism, much to the joy of his mother, who had since joined him. He was received into the Orthodox Church on the following Pascha (387), along with

several friends. Satisfied that Augustine had fulfilled her most earnest desire, St Monica made preparations to return to Tagaste. The holy woman died at the port of Ostia, just as she was about to board the ship that would take her home. She made a last request of her son, *Bury my body anywhere and trouble not yourself, save that you remember me at the altar wherever you may.*

In 391, Augustine returned to North Africa, as bishop of the small African city of Hippo. He also established a quasi-monastic community; it was more a study-group for single men aspiring to the priesthood. Although no meat was eaten, the fasting cannot be viewed as rigid. There was no rule, no organized prayer and no real isolation.⁷

Augustine now resumed his battle against Manicheism. His literary career was now launched in earnest. He wrote about the nature of the universe and the origin and composition of the human soul against the Manicheans. He took up the pen also against the Donatists (followers of a certain, African Bishop Donatus) who taught that the consecration of a bishop by *traditores* (i.e., clergy who "handed over" the holy Scriptures to the Roman authorities in order to avoid torture and death) was null and void. In these and other books, Augustine propounded his notions of baptism and ordination performed outside the Church, opinions which, as we shall see, brought him into conflict with Holy Tradition.

He began also to teach that the Church on earth is not restricted to her visible unity. Once he remarked that *some who have been baptized outside the Church may be considered to have been baptized within while some who seemed to have been baptized within may be understood...more truly to have been baptized outside of her.*⁸ Such a theory has broad implications for God's plan of salvation, the role of the historic Church in it, particularly the Church as guardian of the Mysteries.

Interestingly, it was about this time that he began writing his most celebrated work, *The City of God*, which is a summary of all his beliefs. For a thousand years, the West has believed this book to offer the official Christian

philosophy of history, although this has never been the case in the Orthodox Church.

During his struggle (401-411) with the Donatists, Augustine collided with another enemy of the Church, Pelagius (360-420), a Briton who taught that grace is not necessary for salvation and a life without sin is possible in this life. In answering the heresy of Pelagius, Augustine developed a heresy of his own — the novel doctrine that every human being inherits the guilt of Adam or that God is punishing the human race for the "original sin."

Though Augustine should have known better, he argued that the whole purpose of infant baptism was the eradication of "original sin." Even Pelagius pointed out to him that God provides us with baptism in order to return us to fellowship with Himself in Christ; or, to be more precise, baptism is the divine act of incorporation into the Body of Christ, whereby the initiated also become citizens of the kingdom of God.

Pelagius might have added that sharing in Christ's death and resurrection through baptism and the other Holy Mysteries, the believer enters the process of deification — "*partakers of the divine Nature*" (2Pt.1:4)

But Augustine's understanding of the fallen nature of man has other implications. The idea of "*original sin*" signifies not only that the individual takes no part in his own salvation, but also that he hates God. As we shall see, it is at this point that "*original sin*" links up directly with *predestination*. Driven by the logic of his own theology, Augustine declared that God, in eternity, in his "*most secret counsel*," decided to save a part of the human race and to condemn the rest.

To explain his theory more fully, Augustine wrote, during the last decade of his life, two important books: Concerning the Predestination of the Saints and On the Gift of Perseverance. In them, he reaffirmed in the strongest terms his belief in predestination as well as the compusory nature (irresistibility) of grace. He insisted that these teachings, drawn, as he asserted, from Holy Scripture, did not refute the human will so as to make it impossible for man to choose the good, nor make God appear to be the author of evil.

In his final years, Augustine ventured to refute the Arian heresy (denial of Christ's divinity) which had become the religion of the Goths and Vandals now overrunning Western Europe. He continued the battle with the Pelagians, wrote commentaries on the Psalms, and many letters to friends. Thanks to the efforts of his disciple,

Mercurius Mercator, Augustine was invited to the Third Ecumenical Council (431) to be held at Ephesus. He never attended that Council, however, for he became ill and, after three months, reposed on 28 August, 430, with the Vandals at the very gates of Hippo.

His biographer, Possidius⁹ records that in his last hours Augustine prepared himself for death. Curiously, his final words were a citation from Plotinus. The body of Augustine was laid to rest with honour in the local basilica of St Stephen and later (486) transferred by Fulgentius, Bishop of Ruspe, to the island of Sardinia.

Two centuries passed before his remains were taken, on the heels of the Arab conquest of the island, to mainland Italy. Some question persists about the place of final rest, a marble sarcophagus in the church of San Pietro in the city of Pavia.

The case of Augustine is strange. He was dedicated to the service of God, God as he understood Him. He sincerely believed in Christ: *his belief not the Church's*. He wrote many books in defence of the Christian doctrine, *but according to his private, personal conception of that doctrine*. Moreover, Augustine's historical significance may lay not so much in his influence on post-Orthodox theology and western philosophy, nor even in his perversion of Christian theology, but rather in the fact that, ironically, his efforts in behalf of the Church led ultimately to the West's separation from the Orthodox Church.

1. *Ambigua*, 42.

2. See, for example, Seraphim Rose's *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church*, St Herman Brotherhood Press.

3. *Augustinische Studien*, Gotha, 1887, p.229.

4. *Calvin and Augustine*, Philadelphia, 1956, p.307.

5. There is some question as to whether Augustine ever actually had conversations with St Ambrose. He certainly was never a disciple of the saint. Rev. Dr. John Romanides indicates that considerable, careful research has led him to the conclusion that Augustine did little more than audit a few of St Ambrose's sermons, but never had more than the most cursory conversations with him, and even then, no more than one or two.

6. *A Guide to the Thought of St Augustine*, trans by R.J. Bastain, Chicago, 1960, p.12.

7. Although Augustine wrote a long letter (Nr. 212) on the monastic life, his ideas had no impact on the early Church (see P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Vol.3), "From Constantine to Gregory the Great [311-600]. New York, 1891, p.994. An Augustinian Order was to develop in the Latin Middle Ages, to which Martin Luther belonged.

8. *(On Baptism Against the Donatists, IV, 5, x)*

9. "The Life of Augustine," in *Early Christian Biographies*, ed. by R.J. Deferrari. New York, 1952.

(To be continued)

The Bible:
An Orthodox View.
WHAT THE BIBLE IS NOT.

It should be one of the most meaningful phenomena in all Christendom that those churches which claim that they are "founded on the Bible" disagree on everything under the sun, while those which can look back to pre-biblical times agree on so much.

The chaos of today's fundamentalist groups should be adequate proof to any impartial observer that churches are not to be founded by men, and that it was not the divine will that they be founded outside of Holy Tradition so that the Bible is divorced from the Church in which it truly comes alive.

That a Christian Church was founded by Jesus Christ is apparent to anyone who wishes to consider the facts. And it is historic fact that a Christian Church existed for several years before our present New Testament books were written.

Those who feel that their church was "founded on the Bible" would have been quite out of place in the Church founded upon the apostles and prophets, having our Lord as its chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19).

The absurdity of this position is attested by the facts of history, the internal evidence and the intent of the sacred writers.

First of all, the Scriptures of the first Christians were what we call the Old Testament, that is, their inherited Scriptures as Jews. It is to them that our Lord alludes and from them that he read.

Nothing is said about writing Christian Scriptures, and it is always supposed that the faith is to be conveyed verbally. Even when the sacred writers' purpose in writing is to adjure their readers to stand firm in the faith and to resist novelties and private speculations, only meagre references appear as to what is to be preserved, the details having been verbally conveyed (e.g. I Timothy 6:20).

Not until the middle of the second century

were the books of our New Testament regarded as Scripture, nor were they ranked with those of the Old Testament until about the turn of the third. Doubts about those properly included among them persisted until the late fourth century.

Indeed, the primitive Christian attitude toward the sacred books is utterly unintelligible to us today. Some works of importance, including the source of much material in our first three gospels, was lost entirely and other documents barely escaped oblivion.

The point is that the early Christians, who presumably knew more about the matter than self-constituted modern authorities, did not consider their faith the product of a literature at all, nor did they regard it as depending upon books.

It was centred in an historic figure whom they recognized as God come in the flesh, assuming human nature in its entirety for the reconciliation of fallen mankind.

The internal evidence is equally definite if we face it squarely. For the modern Protestant-fundamentalist idea of the Bible as a sort of dogmatic textbook, a series of letter-precise instructions, is totally at variance with its contents and with the clear intentions of the authors.

The epistles were letters written to Christians of the time for their guidance, exhortation and instruction. Their content reflects contemporary problems and conditions, and it seldom reveals any technicalities, except indirectly.

Incidentally, it is also worth observing that the epistles were the first of our New Testament books to appear, not the gospels. Those to the Thessalonians were first of all, written about A.D. 53. Since this was about 20 years after the Ascension, and since a Christian church had been a going concern in full operation, with its established procedures, organization and Holy Mysteries during that period, it is clear enough that the Christian Church wrote the New Testament, and that the Church was not "founded on" it!

The earliest of the gospels was that ascribed to St Mark and it seems to be drawn in part from

other written or oral sources which predated it, another indication of how little thought was given by the first Christians to the documentation and preservation of their own history! Even though the gospel probably dates from the first century, our first allusion to it appears in the work of Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, who only reaches his maturity toward the end of that century.

No original manuscripts of Mark or any other New Testament books are traceable, until centuries later. We have only passing references to them in the extant writings of the Church Fathers.

Now, once again, we have the clearest possible evidence that the Bible was not written as a basis for a new Christian religion. Had that been the divine purpose, it would have appeared earlier, it would have been referred to as such by the Church's founder, and it would have exhibited the technical precision which we expect in authoritarian manuals.

This is why it can be quoted in support of every absurd notion under the sun, and why the devil can quote it with such effect. Perhaps because it is the greatest and most important of all books, the Bible is exposed to the greatest abuses.

Certainly no one would presume to speak with authority on any other group of ancient documents of whose beginnings, purposes, authorship, language, intentions and milieu, he was uninformed. To understand any document we must first know why it was written, know the language in which it was written, and ideally, know the background, circumstances and environment in which it was written.

Yet, in the case of the Bible, we have every person considering himself an authority. And so it is not surprising that we have about as many varieties of "Bible-believing Christianity" as there are adherents.

If such "Christianity" has proved to be one thing more than anything else, it is an open door to schism and chaos while unity, on the other hand, is to be found only where it started — the Church established by Christ, upon which human wisdom has not presumed to improve.

The Bible is the written word of God. Not withstanding its evident ambiguities and imprecision to those outside the Orthodox Church, the Bible commands a unique veneration by all Christians who will even stretch the manifest meaning of its content to justify their private notions.

This remarkable fact enhances its spiritual authority. When we consult a work for information and it leaves matters uncertain, we do not normally regard it as a model reference for that which we are trying to use it. Yet, open to all manner of abuse, the Bible occupies a unique position in the life of all Christians. This points to the basis of the Bible's authority, which is only dimly sensed by those who have separated themselves from it, but which is more clearly known to those who continue to share the life inherent in the mystical Body of Christ, the Church.

As the Church wrote our Scriptures, so it is by the Church's decision that we know its books truly to be Scripture. Many works of varying value and authorship circulated in the early Church, and it was not a zeal for documentation which led to the official selection of some and the rejection of others. It was rather because spurious works were advanced in support of various heresies which the Church was called upon to combat.

Thus the Bible is a product of the Christian life emanating from the mystical Body of Christ which the Church is.

We must never take these facts as derogatory to the Bible. By placing it in proper context, they reveal the wider scope of grace, which is not confined to a single means of communication. To misconstrue its purpose, to seek technical information which it is not intended to convey, is to misuse it and to deceive ourselves. For, as a fruit of the divine life given through the Church, the Bible partakes of and conveys to us spiritual gifts, not just information.

Those who criticize the Bible's author (the Church) for having ventured from the "good book" would probably be shocked to find it accorded a ceremonious veneration which they themselves deny to it.

Yet, it is solemnly carried about in processions, censed, kissed and read with far more reverence and respect than is ever paid to it in sectarian churches.

The Church, the true "Bible-believing Christianity," ever beckons back to the fullness of their professed faith those who have ventured from her company, casting aside the rich endowment which Christ has entrusted to her as his earthly bride.

For, as He Himself warns us, even those who may cast out demons in His name do not entirely get the point if they neglect the will of the Father, by which our Lord's ministry was ordained, and the new *ekonomia* (dispensation) of His eternal presence among us was established (Mt.7:21-22).

There is more to it than merely professing our faith in Him. That is but the essential first step. We must become one with Him through the means which He established, and accept those precious gifts which He offers us, accepting His invitation to His heavenly banquet (Jn.6:53-58).

It is a characteristic and revealing inconsistency of popular "Bible" Christianity that it will dismiss as mere metaphor a clear prescription for eternal life, while taking in the most literal sense texts of secondary or trifling import. We may be sure that our Lord was not just being rhetorical when He enunciated His covenant with the new Jerusalem in terms of the Holy Mystery. And if the many references to it were intended only to invite the fellowship of His hearers, this was certainly the time to say so, and not to alienate them by saying that eternal life was to be received in His body and blood! (Jn.6:28-65).

The tragic loss of so many millions who have cut themselves off from the blessings which our Lord has bequeathed to them is the cardinal tragedy of false "Biblical" Christianity, a religion made by man and substituting man's judgments and tastes for the guidance of the Holy Spirit which was promised to the Church.

The Bible is the book of the Church and, outside of the Church and her life, it can do little of itself but go right over the head of the reader, save for its most basic truths which, God willing, may lead the reader to the Church.

Readings with Reader Nicholas:

A regular book review feature

by Nicholas Franck

**The Eclipse of Man and Nature by
Phillip Sherrard. Lindisfarne Press,
118 pgs.**

In the world of contemporary Orthodox Christian theology, only occasionally does a work attract such attention as The Eclipse of Man and Nature. This is not, as harsh critics of the state of our contemporary theological writings are wont to imply, due to a lack of scholarship in the ranks, but because our scholars quite typically are focused on the revisiting of patristic and scriptural texts. Phillip Sherrard is remarkable in producing a contemporary theological treatise which in its innovation certainly warrants the attention received.

Among the most fundamental propositions of Eclipse of Man and Nature is that a mystical view of creation, a creation sanctified and renewed through the incarnation, is as viable a world-view in every respect as the competing perspective of naturalists that represent the scientism which has emerged as the dominant voice of Western modernity. Sherrard characterises scientism as a school of thought which has exacerbated the divine/human estrangement brought about initially by the fall. The manner in which scientism has compromised and finally destroyed any redemptive aspects of Western religious tradition is seen as especially noxious, having infected in its global hegemony also precious tenets of Eastern religious life through an invited ideological colonisation. Sherrard openly acknowledges a lack of scientific expertise, insisting that scientists themselves lack an appreciable capacity for self-criticism, due to the high degree of specialisation their professions demand, and the correspondent lack of breadth in their educational backgrounds. The author declares an intent to present the Eastern Church's ontological teachings on humankind's proper relationship toward divine creation as the appropriate alternative to a modern scientism

held to be dehumanising in its very false and narrow premises.

The work's exposition commences with a discussion of what constitutes the role of man in the context of creation as given through the teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Dr Sherrard examines in some detail the dynamics of man's original and natural state as created offspring of God, imaged and aspiring to the likeness of the Creator, in communion not only with Him, but with all His bounteous works, nurturing this mystical relationship with all being, through the exercise of a priestly stewardship. The details of Sherrard's narrative are designed for the information of a general readership, and shall not be recounted here, as Reader Nicholas well knows the Missionary readership is familiar with the theological intricacies of paradisiacal, Edenic consciousness. Matters raised by the author which are not part of such familiar discourse is the way in which Platonic thought has figured as a convenient metaphor in early Christian writings. Dr Sherrard holds Platonism a preferred philosophic analogy for Christian thought, as contrasted to Aristotelianism, the latter model seen as antecedent to the mind-set of modern scientism. While acknowledging the error of Augustine, a new-Platonist, in introducing the heretical teaching of the doctrine of original sin, Augustine is credited by Sherrard with what salvageable components of the notion of theosis can be extracted from Latin theology.

By way of describing the historical rise of science, Sherrard notes that it was Latin scholasticism itself which was the purveyor of its own seeds of destruction. Rationalist apologetics such as those of Thomas Aquinas tended to overshadow in their doctrinal emphasis what Sherrard describes as an earlier universal sacramentalism pervasive in the culture of the Western Church. The preference of Latin scholastics for Aristotelian objectivity, as contrasted to Platonic abstraction, resulted in the emergence of a nascent proto-scientism. The empirical research methods of such as Galileo, Bacon and Newton, tended to vindicate, in the popular academic mind, the potential of empirical method as a

conveyance of demonstrable truth. Empiricism, in turn, was buttressed by the early modern rationalism of such as Rene Descartes, who observed that our private, human reason was the only ontological truth of which we could be immediately and intimately aware. Refined Cartesian rationalism, coupled with the empirical method would become the new ethos of the West, and, Sherrard says, has been the pronounced Western world view from the 17th century. This adaptation has occurred at the expense of any other perspective, most notably the sacramental one. The author finds this scientism objectionable not only in its overbearing arrogance, which he believes is entirely unwarranted, but in its necessarily dehumanising consequences. The objectification of science, the concentration on isolated phenomena for purpose of study, resulted in a nature and humanity, once seen as part of a sacred continuum, now described as mere 'things', dissected for thorough examination. Concerns with eternal and ultimate being are too broad and nebulous for this type of methodology, and, as such, apt to be relegated to the confines of pathological lunacy by its practitioners, who have come to occupy the plane of public regard, once the domain of the clergy.

Dr Sherrard challenges the authority of science on its own terms. That is, in calling the reader's attention to the way in which science overreaches its bounds in pronouncing as factual, findings which are all too often the outcome of ambiguous experiment, uncertain data at best. Such pursuits Sherrard labels diabolical, in that such a discipline is deceptive in nature, and lies are the spawn of the Evil-one. It is incumbent upon the faithful, the author notes, to contest such deceptions. The devout ought also, he continues, to recognise the divinity with which creation is imbued, and to act accordingly as stewards, dutifully in our roles as participants in the process of theotic communion joyously proclaimed through the incarnation.

The apparent aim in developing this thesis can be readily appreciated. Orthodox Christians, indeed, religionists of all persuasions, are conversant with the manner in which detractors

of faith charge the apologist with accusations of naive superstition and the moral burden of all excesses of religion from the Spanish Inquisition to the Jonestown Massacre. Often only the mention of an interest in, say, the solace of contemplative prayer, will suffice to incur such outrage. Sherrard's approach to such ubiquitous chauvinism seems to offer a response in kind, in that his account of Western scientific and cultural history seems selected and truncated to the end by forcing his postulates. To begin, Sherrard dismisses out of hand the possibility of anything that could meaningfully be called an insightful philosophy of science, that scholars in such a field could produce any critique of scientific method not of the form of self-congratulatory accolade. Media audiences are acquainted with the celebrity researcher, who having made some breakthrough discovery in the realm of microorganic cell reproduction or computer chip technology, demands to share with us some sophomoric opinions on the secrets of the ages. Sherrard, while deriding such gaffes, seems committed to their repetition, in that it is not the cloistered specialist he most often takes to task, but such as the astrophysicist and mathematical theorist, whom it would appear might have some genuine interest in such topics as the plausible nature of universal natural order. If the author believes such interest to be facetious, he might at least appreciate that the arduous nature of spiritual quests may entail the 'working through' of vain impediments erected by science, or art, or philosophy, or whatever competing metaphysical interests serve to separate us from God. It may be short-sighted to maintain it entirely impossible that God may be revealed through any of these, or a myriad of other areas. Indeed, some academic background is requisite to grasp Sherrard's points of reference.

Given such background, one might question Sherrard's pointed historical interpretations. The links between the reintroduction of Aristotelian texts by Latin monastics to the eventual evolution of Cartesian rationalism are straightforward enough. A historian of the author's repute is also aware that it is not only this intellectual tradition, from within the bounds

of the ancient Western Church which produced rational empiricism, but also influences from the Protestant North such as Leibnitz, and the British empiricists such as Locke, Bentham and Hume, who shaped scientific modernity to a great degree. Sherrard, however, declines to ask how the Reformation may have undone the ties of the extant spiritual community or how the socio-economic developments of empirical thought, utilitarianism and bourgeois mercantilism, might have razed the dehumanized and desanctified landscape. Neither does Sherrard note that it is from this bleak landscape that post modern thinkers decrying the sharp limitations of scientism and the primacy of pure reason will emerge, nor that they have been doing so for the past two centuries. Thus, one must ask whether scientism was ever quite so complete a motif of contemporary Western culture as Sherrard assumes. Augustine and Aquinas, persistently referred to as 'saints' are presented as well-intentioned, though partially inept, guardians of the faith, yet it is difficult to undo the damage suffered by Christianity by the heretical doctrine of original sin or the folly of Thomist attempts to foster belief through irrefutable 'proofs' of the existence of God. While Platonism admittedly enjoys some analogical strengths over Aristotelianism in explanation of the theoretical dynamics of theosis, the roots of the Cartesian mind/body fragmentation and mentalist superiority are evident in Platonic thought as well. As any modal logician can readily attest, analogy as a reasoning device is a flawed one and the Christian who trades too heavily in Platonic or other philosophic analogies runs the risk of the mistaken belief that God is an idea, perhaps a product of our minds, or more charitably put, that we are God's thoughts. Finally, one may not be persuaded to Sherrard's account of Western Orthodox religious practice as being essentially intact through the 13th century when the filioque is said to have arisen as a heresy in the 7th century and the Carolingian dynasty usurped the Western apostolic episcopal order circa the 9th century. Moreover, the continual suggestion that the fall's full implications were only realised with European analytical techniques developed two

hundred years ago seems to ignore that such are the acknowledged product of events which Christians believe occurred in a prehistoric epoch.

Despite reservations as to the flow of this thesis, it is a provocative and tersely written work which deserves to be read. Dr Sherrard is a world renowned Orthodox Christian scholar who has written numerous original works and translated many patristic writings from Greek into English. Any criticism directed at the author's interpretation are not intended to cast aspersions as to his credibility, as his choices of interpretation must be views to which he is committed in light of his considerable resources. Many valuable themes are explored within *Eclipse..*, most memorably the implications drawn in its final pages regarding the manner in which the Latin filioque presents a truncated view of the Trinity, suggesting a creator external to creation rather than a Holy Spirit moving into and throughout creation. One notion of spirituality that Sherrard describes as drawn from patristic sources is that of the 'subtle' or 'spiritual body', and the Reader would caution traditionalist (and all) reading audiences that this teaching is at least more controversial than Sherrard allows. The manner in which Sherrard notes that linguistic conventions fostered by scientism lead to references to ourselves and others as 'subjects', 'specimens', and to emotional and mental responses as 'mechanisms' does tend to bear out the concern of the author's that we are too readily drawn into the dehumanising features of scientism. The fashion in which not only Latin scholasticism but rational-empiricism sought to 'prove' God, served just as available to 'disprove' His existence and diminish His felt presence in our lives. It is this existential belief that Sherrard presumes of the reader, and which even recounting of scripture or patristics may not invoke, but which will prepare more aptly an abode for the Spirit than can smug modernity.

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CHILDREN'S CORNER

by Fr Moses Armstrong

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

Pentecost is one of the 12 great feast days of our Orthodox Faith. In the Gospel of Saint John, we read that Christ promised to His followers that another would come in His place to be with them forever; this was the "Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father..." (John 15:26) and whom we know as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was sent down on the apostles at Pentecost in the form of fiery tongues, and upon the whole church until the end of time. All the people in Jerusalem, no matter what nation they came from, were amazed to hear the apostles speaking to them in their own language. The Holy Spirit still comes down upon us at our baptism and chrismation, when we receive "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit". The same Holy Spirit guides those who struggle to keep the Orthodox Faith and Holy Tradition alive and try to share it with other people so that they also can be saved.

The Orthodox Church has been very well known for the custom and tradition of spreading the Orthodox Faith in the languages of the different people of the world. One of the first things that Orthodox missionaries do is work on translating the Holy Gospels and the Divine Liturgy into the language of the people who are converting. Then, other holy books are translated and given to the people to read. Many saints are famous for their holy work of translating holy books and teaching new people who come to the Orthodox Church to learn about God and to be closer to Him.

The Orthodox feast of Pentecost comes from the Hebrew feast of Pentecost which celebrated the first crops of the harvest season and was a time of giving thanks to God for them. During this harvest feast, homes and synagogues were decorated with green plants, flowers, fruits and vegetables, as a way of showing how much God blesses us.

The early Christians adopted this feast and custom to thank God for His love and goodness in giving the Holy Spirit to us to comfort us in our sorrow, fill us with wisdom and the love of truth, and teach us to have sorrow when we are becoming far from God.

The custom of decorating homes and churches with flowers, green plants and fruits and vegetables, was once popular in all the Orthodox churches throughout the world. Today, the Slavic Orthodox people (Russians, Bulgarians, Serbians, Slovaks, Ukrainians) are the ones who have preserved this custom. This is a pious Orthodox custom that all Orthodox people should adopt. We can take flowers and green branches to church to decorate the icons, the windows and all the church.



One special thing that we will notice about the Pentecost services in the Orthodox Church is that the hymn "Heavenly King, Comforter..." is sung for the first time on this day. We were not allowed to make prostrations after Pascha and until Pentecost; there are seven prayers which are called "prostration prayers" which are read by the priest during the Vespers service which follows immediately after the Divine Liturgy for Pentecost. For the first time after Pascha, everyone is prostrating with their heads and knees on the floor. In this way, we too are joining all our Orthodox Christian brothers and sisters of the past, present and to come, in thanking God for His Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Spirit of Truth.

THE CANADIAN ORTHODOX READER

by Father Moses Armstrong

GRANDMA TAKES US TO THE MONASTERY

Grandma called to let us know of the plans to make a pilgrimage to the monastery. We planned to go for the feast of Pentecost and wanted to talk with Grandma first, so she could explain to us what to do when we were at the monastery after all, we had never been to a monastery and we wanted to know what to expect. This would also give her a chance to explain the Pentecost feast to us.

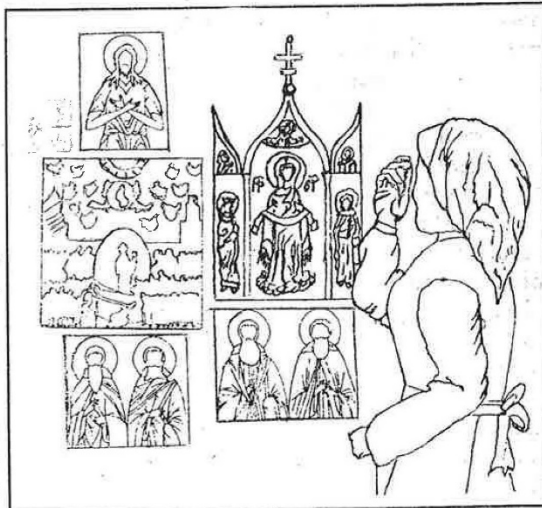
We met Grandma at our house. She came a day before the trip to the monastery so we could visit without being rushed and have lots of time to hear what she had to say about Pentecost. We looked forward to every visit with Grandma and also to her telling us about the Orthodox Faith and about her life and about how we could be better and more like her. She has been Orthodox all her life and spent most of her extra time going to church, helping the church make money for things the church needed, or working on projects that would help people to learn more about the Orthodox Faith. My little sister and I think Grandma is as close to a saint as anybody we know, although Grandma would not want us to say that, in fact, we can just hear her saying to us, "Nobody knows if they are a saint and you can be sure that if they think they are holy and saintly, then they are far from it. A saint is a person who knows that they are far from God and who keeps trying to be close to Him and love Him more and more. Only God knows if we tried to love Him all our lives and we have to live our whole life for this to happen." Any way, we think she is pretty close to God and she sure tries to help other people learn about our Orthodox Church and about God and about heaven.

Any way, when Grandma came to the house, she asked us to take her to the icons before we did anything else. She crossed herself three times and then bowed and said, "Bless us, O Lord." We all did the same thing as Grandma and then went to the kitchen where mom had already set out hot tea and coffee and several kinds of cookies for a snack.

"What is so special about a monastery, anyway?" asked my sister. "Who needs nuns and monks when we have our own icons at home and our own church to pray in?"

Mom and dad didn't know what to say, I didn't know what to say. Well, Grandma spoke up firmly but gently.

"You need to understand that monastery life is not just ordinary life. In a monastery, monks or nuns live the whole life for God. They struggle to fast, pray, repent of their many sins, and work to preserve the holy traditions of the Orthodox Faith. They give up their whole life to God. They work to save their own souls and by doing this, become teachers who show us the way to save our own souls. Much of their work is not seen by people outside the monastery. Some monks paint icons, some sew the vestments that you see being worn in church, some bind books or print books that teach the Orthodox Faith. Some monasteries have factories for making icons and some make candles and incense. This all takes time and is just as much work as being a teacher or a plumber or working in an office. The only difference is that an office worker gets a certain amount of money each month but monks get nothing for all their work; how many people would give their whole lives for working and not getting



paid? Monks and nuns work for God and hope for their reward in the next life and also for the Orthodox Church to be stronger and passed on to future generations of people. Please remember all this and pray for their work because it is not easy to do this." "We will", we promised Grandma.

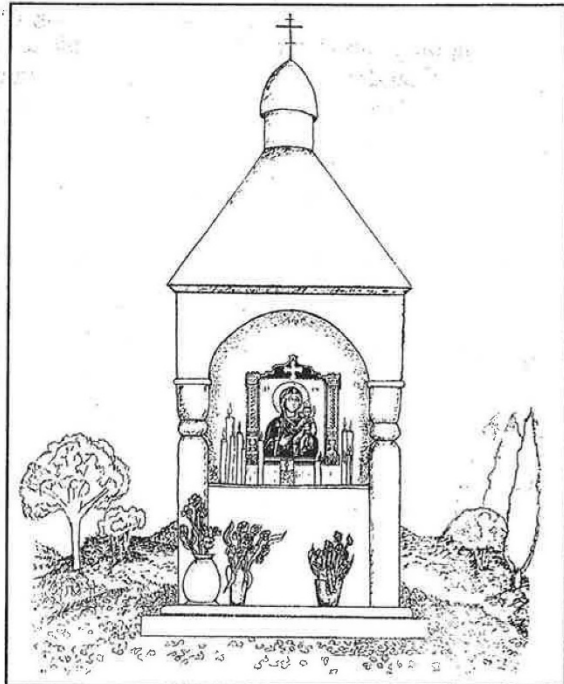
The following morning, we all got up and went to the icons once again to ask for God to bless us for our visit to the monastery and help to celebrate the holy feastday of Pentecost. We all got into the car and drove off.

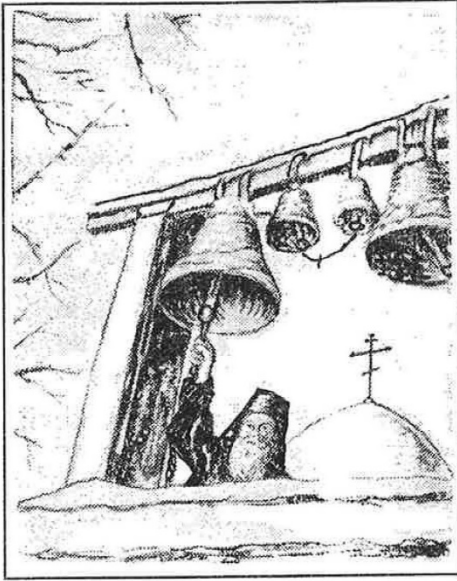
It was quite a long way. We left the city and drove along the Trans-Canada Highway until coming to the small village where the monastery is. We drove onto a small, dirt lane with large, old trees hanging over the lane, so it was like driving in a cave of leaves. The shade was nice because it made the road and the drive up to the main gate, cool and more comfortable. Since it was early spring, there were all kinds of plants with flowers and all kinds of smells in the air. Some of the smells were really sweet and nice, like the wild flowers and herbs growing in the fields. Other smells were not so nice, like the water in the little stream which was not moving and had lots of green plants and water lilies growing in it. It was full of frogs and we saw some small fish swimming slowly around.

We finally got to the main gate where there was a large dirt and sandy area made just for visitors to stop and park their cars. We stopped, got out and followed Grandma to the little chapel which is at the main gate. After entering the little chapel, we bought candles and lit them before the icon of the Theotokos who is the "keeper of the gate" to all monasteries. We crossed ourselves, kissed the icon and then walked out and onto the monastery grounds. What a surprise it was to be here. There were so many kinds of plants around the monastery and in the trees and bushes were all kinds of birds and other animals. In the water nearby were frogs and lizard-looking animals as well as mosquitoes and lots of dragonflies.

The Abbot of the monastery was occupied with preparing for the feast and so we were met by one of the monks who was in charge of caring for visitors. He escorted us to the main church where we were able to take the greenery and some plants we had brought to decorate the icons in the church. After kissing the icons and putting our greenery all around, we were shown the way to the reception

room where guests are received. The abbot came in briefly to welcome all to the monastery for the feast and to remind them that this is a holy place and that all were expected to behave in a proper way. Some of the kids had shorts and some of the boys had taken their shirts off, so they had to change their clothes. Boy, did they have to scurry around to find enough clothes to cover everyone. All the girls, including my sister, had to cover their heads but Grandma had brought a lot of extra head coverings in her handbag so this was no problem.





After all this was settled, the bells rang for the service in the main church of the monastery. There was a thanksgiving service with the blessing of holy water and then confessions were heard. Following this, everyone went outside where there was a large picnic which was made up of the food everyone had brought along with them. It was really nice for everyone to share their food with everyone else; also, this gave us a chance to taste the things that everyone else cooked and compare them to mom and Grandma's cooking. When all had finished eating, there was a talk given by one of the priests of the monastery on the meaning of the feast of Pentecost. We were then dismissed when the large bell rang to let us know that evening Vespers had begun.

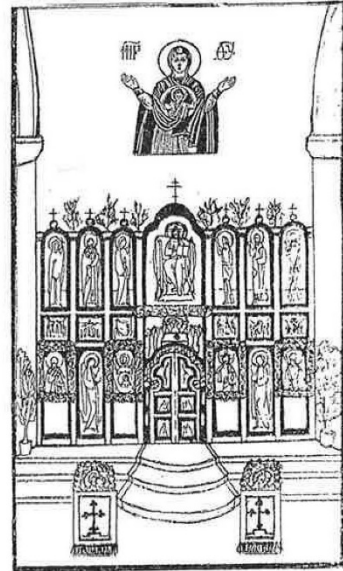
How beautiful the large church was with the green branches around the icons on the iconostas and the flowers wreathed all around the icons on the icon stands. Truly,

we felt that Pentecost was right there in the monastery church. We knew that the Holy Spirit was with us now just as it was with the followers of Christ on the first Pentecost day. For those who could not tell, the services and the decoration were teachers and reminders that the Holy Spirit was there. Just as the green plants receive their life from the sun and the soil, so we receive spiritual life from God and our cooperation with the Holy Spirit. When we are removed from the Holy Spirit, we die just like the plants when they are removed from the soil and the sun.

After the Divine Liturgy was ended, we began the Vespers service of the Pentecost, which also had the prostration prayers. It was wonderful to hear the chants of the Vesper service and to sing, "Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth; Who art everywhere present. And fillest all things. Treasury of good gifts and giver of life. Come and abide in us, and cleanse us of all impurity; and save our souls, O good one."

Since we had not sung this hymn since Pascha, it made a big impression and we will always remember it. Grandma was almost crying and had that kind of red, puffy face grandma's get sometimes. She got out her handkerchief and wiped her eyes until the hymn was finished.

Now came the prostration prayers. Grandma bent down onto her knees and then put her head to the floor so we did the same thing she did. We stayed this way until the end of the prayer and then another prayer was said and we knelt down on the floor and put our head down, just like Grandma. This was done seven times and then there were some more prayers and the end of Vespers when we came up to kiss the cross and the icon of the feast day of Pentecost. Everyone left the church and gathered in different spots on the monastery grounds where they talked about different things; icons, saints, feast days and fasting. People went to the little monastery gift shop where there were crosses and icons as well as many books to buy and take home as gifts to other people and as memories of this holy day and this holy place.





We asked for the Abbot's blessing then said goodbye to everyone and walked to the little chapel at the gate where we all crossed ourselves and kissed the icon and asked for a blessing for our journey home.

When we took Grandma home, she invited us in for tea, which mom and dad accepted. We had tea and talked a bit then dad said it was time to go. We asked Grandma for her blessing, kissed her and then left, taking our memory of the holy day and the knowledge that the Holy Spirit was with all of us and will be with the Church until the end of time.

PENTECOST AT ST NICHOLAS CANADIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, LANGLEY, B.C.



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Editorial Staff:

Fr. Moses Armstrong
Reader Nicholas Franck

Michel Delaunay

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