

Archive 2001

Remembering the Holocausts - A Century of Shame

by Father Michael Harper

The century, which has just passed, was one of unprecedented bloodshed. There were not only wars on a massive scale, but acts of genocide of hideous proportions. The famous Rabbi, the late Hugo Gryn, who was imprisoned in Auschwitz, answered the question "where was God in Auschwitz?" - "I believe God was there Himself, violated and blasphemed. The real question is where was man in Auschwitz?"

One hundred years ago the Victorian age was slipping away. Queen Victoria herself was only to live for a few weeks in the new century. There was a sense of high achievement. Most felt it had been a good century. But not so with the one which we have just said "goodbye" to. Allan Massie, writing in the Daily Telegraph on Boxing Day this year, comments - "today there is no such feeling in the air of a great age that is passing. The 20th Century is merely being shuffled off."

The Idea of Progress was one of the dominant streams of thought at the beginning of the 20th Century. It has taken a nose dive as the century has progressed. When I once asked a flight attendant on a Lebanese plane, "are you Christian or Moslem" he replied "neither, I have lived through the Civil War". In his book Chasing Shadows Hugo Gryn writes of the Shoah (Holocaust) "It is certainly for Christians a disaster: it is the ultimate betrayal of the values for which Christianity stands".

In drawing attention to the Orthodox Holocausts one is by no means minimising the crimes committed against the Jewish people in theirs. Also in the European setting it is important to place the blame fairly. The Germans were the guilty perpetrators of the Jewish genocide. But much of the rest of Europe co-operated. Again Hugo Gryn writes, "All parts of society in Europe colluded, the academic, the judiciary, industry, business, trade unions, educators."

But the Orthodox holocausts were terrible also. It is not often recognised that in the case of Russia it exceeded the Jewish in terms of victims massacred, or imprisoned in concentration camps, or Gulags as they came to be called in Russia. But there was something uniquely horrible about the Shoah. The calculated manner in which it was organised and the treatment of human beings surely touched a nadir of human history.

The Shoah is now remembered in numerous holocaust museums. The Jews are right to keep reminding us of the depths that mankind can go in degradation. But the time has come for Christians to remember their holocausts, which have largely been forgotten. In the case of the Armenian this has been the deliberate policy of the Turks who were its perpetrators. Even recently the American House of Representatives withdrew an Armenian genocide resolution. More about that later. So, as we look at what our Christian brothers and sisters have suffered for their faith, let us do so in the spirit of forgiveness, exemplified during the year 2000 by Pope John Paul II.

When the husband of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, herself later a victim of the Russian holocaust - was blown to pieces by an assassin's bomb in Russia, she had a monument placed in the square where he died, with the words "Father, forgive them they know not what they do." We can do no other.

As David Barrett has shown, there have been more Christian martyrs in the 20th Century than in all the previous centuries put together. Orthodox holocausts have been selected not only because they have been numerically the largest, but also the least well known.

"Who today remembers the Armenians?"

Armenia was the first nation to embrace Christianity, and has a long and well developed Christian history. Starting in 1915 the Turks systematically murdered over 1.5 million Armenians, most of them Orthodox Christians. It started on April 8th, when over 10,000 were murdered. By April 19th it was known in Berlin that more than 50,000 had been murdered in the Province of Van alone. The Armenians appealed for protection to Germany because it was supposed to be a Christian country, and was also the ally of Turkey.

At first no protest was expressed from other countries. Appeals to the United States fell on deaf ears. The massacres went on. In Bitlis 15,000 Armenians were murdered in 8 days. In the port of Trebizond over a two week period, over 17,000 were killed in an orgy of destruction by Turkish troops. At the same time over 200,000 were forcibly converted to Islam. Eventually on May 24th there was a joint statement made by the British, French and Russian governments describing the killings as "a crime against humanity and civilisation". The original Russian draft had the words "Christianity and civilisation". But the British and French had the word "Christianity" changed to "humanity" in order not to offend the Muslims in India and the French colonies. Times have not changed much in this respect.

William Dalrymple, a Roman Catholic travel writer, in his book *From the Holy Mountain* gives eye witness evidence when he travelled through Anatolia of the deliberate attempt of the Turks to destroy all the evidence of the pogrom. He saw old Armenian church buildings being literally ground to powder. We need to remember that when Adolf Hitler was asked about the possible repercussions of the Shoah he said - "who today remembers the Armenians?"

From 1945 the politics of the cold war has played a big part in all this. NATO, formed to defend western Europe, had to secure the support of the Turks to defend a vulnerable flank which was close to Russia. This was the main reason also why NATO did nothing when Turkey invaded and annexed a part of Cyprus. Like the Cypriots the Armenians are deemed by the Great Powers as too insignificant to bother with in the power struggles of our day.

Russia

The major area of suffering by Christians in the last century has been in Russia. Although the persecutions affected other Roman Catholic and Protestant communities, it was the Orthodox Church which bore the brunt of it. In 1917 there were over 80,000 Orthodox Churches, Chapels and Monasteries in Russia. By 1939, probably the nadir of the fortunes of the Russian Orthodox Church, there were only 200-300 left.

By 1939 over 80,000 bishops, priests, deacons and religious had been murdered. The suffering of the laity was both economic and political. Famine took at least 7 million in 1922, and more than 7 million in 1930. The purges of Stalin in 1934 killed at least 19 million Russians, including millions of Orthodox believers. Stalin in his five year plan of 1932 made it his open objective to eradicate the whole Church. In 1914 there were 163 bishops; by 1939 there were only 4 active bishops left. In 1914 there were 51,000 priests, in 1939 a few hundred. In 1914 57 seminaries. In 1939 none.

It is often overlooked that some of the worst persecution occurred after the Second World War. From 1959 onwards, this was carried out under the direction of Khrushchev.

Croatia in the former Yugoslavia

The former Dean of Winchester, Trevor Beeson, writing in his book *Discretion and Valour*, says that it is "impossible to understand the present religious situation in Yugoslavia without taking into account the wartime sufferings of the country." Although he was writing about the 70s, his words are equally valid for our day, and particularly in the light of the recent conflict in Kosovo. Croatia became independent in 1991 after it had been invaded by Italian, German, Hungarian and Bulgarian armies. A puppet State in inner Serbia was set up under a Fascist, Ante Pavelic, and the rest of the country was carved up between the invaders. The Fascist party was called Ustasa. Its aim was to avenge the

repression of Croats by Serbs and to "purify" the State of Orthodoxy. It was made public that one-third of Serbs would be converted (to Roman Catholicism), one-third expelled and one-third killed. The vision had clearly expressed devotion to the Roman Catholic Church and the spirit of the Crusades. It effectively destroyed the Orthodox Church in this area. Some Roman Catholic priests and friars took part in the killings and acts of violence.

Of the 2 million Serbs targeted, 350,000 were killed, 300,000 deported or fled and 250,000 converted under duress to the Roman Catholics. There were mass re-baptisms. Three Bishops and about 220 priests were murdered.

Why remember?

Are not these horrors best forgotten? Unfortunately they have a habit of sticking in the consciousness of those affected. Both Northern Ireland and the Palestinian issues testify clearly to this. People don't forget easily. Nor should they be asked to do so. But for Christians the remembrance will have a different feel about it.

First of all, our minds need to be purged of a spirit of hatred or revenge. There is nothing that men can do to one another which cannot be forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Christ. Above all our remembrances need to be in the setting of forgiveness; we need to leave judgement in the hands of God.

Secondly, we have a duty to remember because those who suffered were our own brothers and sisters in Christ. As the Church remembers the martyrs of all past centuries, so these need to be held in honour by us all. Their memory is eternal.

Sources

The Armenian massacres - A History of the Twentieth Century Vol 1 by Martin Gilbert. The Russian - A Long Walk to Church - a contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy by Nathaniel Davis. The Serbian - Discretion and Valour by Trevor Beeson .

Fr. Michael Harper

The Dance of Love

Sermon preached at St Aethelheard's Orthodox Church, Louth Cemetery Chapel, Divine Liturgy, Sunday, November 12, 2000. 21st Sunday after Pentecost. St John the Merciful. Remembrance Sunday.

READINGS: - Galatians 2.16-20; Luke 10.25-37 & Matt. 5.14-19.

The eighth Sunday of the Luke cycle: the Sunday of the Good Samaritan. The story in St Luke's Gospel tells us what it means to live a Christian life. It is a life based on love of God and love of neighbour.

A lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus tells him he must love God and his neighbour as himself. So the lawyer asks him, "Who is my neighbour?". Jesus answers him by telling the story of the Good Samaritan. The neighbour of the Jewish traveller on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was the man who showed him that he loved him as God loves us. His neighbour was the foreigner who, when he found him lying at the side of the road after he had been beaten up by robbers and left half dead, bound up his wounds and helped him to the inn and looked after him; not his fellow Jews who passed by on the other side. The parable makes clear that our neighbour is the person

who needs our help, and the neighbour of the person who needs help is the person who shows he loves unconditional, as God loves all of us.

It is therefore appropriate that today we also celebrate one of the great saints of the Church, John the Merciful (also called John the Almsgiver), a Patriarch of Alexandria of the early seventh century. He was a man like the Good Samaritan, for he gave all his wealth to help the poor and needy of his patriarchate.

Today is also the Sunday after Remembrance Day, when we commemorate those who died in the two World Wars, and the many after conflicts before and since. This commemoration is connected with the main theme of this Sunday in a negative way, for, while the story of the Good Samaritan and the life of St John the Merciful demonstrate what human love is like when we obey God by following Jesus Christ, what happened in the two World Wars reminds us what human beings can do when they are at their worst; when they do not follow Jesus Christ but go their own way, following the forces of evil. When we do God's will, we are capable of perfect love; when we do the devil's will, we are capable of the most extreme hate. Satan is incapable of love.

Recently I was reading a children's book by an American woman author.. It was written about 40 years ago, and is of the same genre as C.S. Lewis's Narnia stories, though ostensibly science fiction. (Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*, Dell Publishing New York 1962).

It concerns a family of four children, whose parents are scientists - their father a physicist and their mother a biologist and biochemist. The children are a girl of about twelve, ten year old boy twins, and a five-year old little brother, who is a genius (to such an extent that he already speaks in the language of scientific textbooks).

The father of the family has been engaged in a research project for the US Government, in the course of which he has discovered the "tesseract", a means of travelling through space (and time) by means of short cut which makes reaching distant galaxies almost instantaneously. The short cut is achieved by going from our third dimension into the fifth dimension, and then emerging at another place in the third dimension! Or the same thing can be done with time - our fourth dimension.

Father has been experimenting with "tessering", but he isn't very good at it, and has got lost in space. He has been missing more than a year, and this has been causing his children much unhappiness at school, for everyone except his family is convinced he has gone off with another woman. It cannot possibly be true, because, besides being a brilliant scientist, mother is also beautiful (and why not?).

Well, the children encounter three witches. Or rather, they are disguised as witches; really they are messengers acting on behalf of the forces of good. In fact they are angels, for, although the author does not use theological language, it is clear that the ethos of her book is intentionally Christian. It appears that the children's father is up against the forces of evil, what the "witches" call the Black Thing. The devil (in effect), perceived as a sort of black cloud, but possessing a superhuman personality, is determined to take over all the planets of all the galaxies of the universe. Some planets are fighting back, but others have surrendered, and these are called "dark planets".

In the course of his attempt at tessering, the children's father has landed up on a dark planet, where he has been imprisoned by the Black Thing, which has established itself there in a dome (that's ominous!), in the shape of a huge human brain called IT (with two capital letters).

On the dark planet IT had created a perfect world, according to a demonic view of perfection. Everybody was exactly the same. The children of the planet even bounced balls or played with skipping ropes exactly in unison, according to a rhythm emanating from IT. No blemishes were permitted on the perfect planet; no diseases, for instance. Anyone who caught a cold was "put to sleep". Everyone was supposed to be perfectly happy. In fact, everyone was desperately unhappy, because there was no free

will. Was it not the sort of world human beings always end up with when they try to make a "perfect world" on their own, without God's help (which in practice means with the devil's help

The 12-year-old girl, her five-year-old brother and the boy from a neighbouring family were chosen by the witches/angels to go and rescue the father of the family from the dark planet. They take them there by tessering, which, of course, the witches are able to do perfectly. They are able to achieve this, but, in the process, the five-year old genius (who is an arrogant little boy, and will not take the witches' advice) falls into its clutches. His mind is taken over while he is trying to outwit the mighty brain. So they have to leave him behind.

The witches send the girl back to the dark planet to rescue her little brother, advising her to "think of what you have got that IT has not got." Arrived again at IT's dome she tries to do this. First she thinks of anger. She is a rather rebellious young lady and has plenty of that. But IT has much more anger and easily defeats her. Next she tries hate, but again IT has much more it than she has (is not the devil the very prince of hate?) and again she is defeated. Then, just in time, she remembers that her parents love her, and so do her brothers and the boy from the neighbouring family, and the three witches, and all sorts of people. And she loves them. So she throws her arms round her little brother, and says, "I love you!" That is too much for IT. For love is just what IT has not got. So the little boy is rescued and they all return home safely.

Now I don't know if there are human beings on planets in other galaxies; nor, if there are, whether they are in need of salvation. Nor do I know whether or not the devil is seeking to destroy the whole universe as well as the earth and its inhabitants. These are matters for speculation, and this kind of speculation is possible only in fiction. As Christians we may read speculative fiction for pleasure, but we must not base what we believe on it. That can be based only what God has revealed to us through his only Son, Jesus Christ, and belief in which is strengthened by the working of the Holy Spirit within us. There was just one phrase that made me quote that story to you. "Love is what IT has not got."

That is a very good negative definition of love. "Love is what the devil has not got". For there can be no love without God, since love comes from God; indeed St John the Theologian goes still further and says "God is love". (I John 4.8b). There are many people in the world who love. Besides Christians there are Jews, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists and people of no religion at all; certainly there are many people who love who are not ostensibly or consciously Christians. But love persists in the world because, and only because, because God is active in it. He is active through the Church of his only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, established by his victory, when he died on the Cross and rose again from the dead three days later. That is the source of the love in the world; without it love would atrophy. Just as a river dries up when it is cut off from its source.

In a world in which God is active through his Church the forces of evil are active too. So we have had world wars and we still have hatred and violence. Without Christ and his Church the devil would reign in time. We might have "perfection"; of the same order as the perfect world created by IT on the dark planet. We should not have love.

God is love because God is a Trinity of Persons united in one divine Nature - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are united by a great bond of love in a fellowship so complete that they are said to indwell one another, or "coinhere". The technical term is perichoresis. We are invited to join that great fellowship of love. As Bishop Kallistos puts it in one of his books:-

"The final end of the spiritual Way is that we humans should also become part of this Trinitarian coinherence or perichoresis, being wholly taken up into the circle of love that exists within God." (The Orthodox Way, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, first published 1979. P.34.).

We do not, of course, become persons of the Trinity! We cannot become "gods" by nature. But God invites, through his grace, to share in the status of the Persons of the Trinity; to love God and one another as Father, Son and Holy Spirit love one another.

There is a popular hymn by the well-known modern hymn-writer Sidney Carter in which our Lord Jesus Christ is described (or caused to describe himself) as "Lord of the Dance" (using, I believe, a metaphor taken from an "apocryphal gospel" - one of those early works about Jesus considered edifying but not reliable enough to be included in the New Testament). Perhaps for us human beings perichoresis is rather like a dance which our Lord leads, or a chorus which he conducts. (Actually the Trinity leads, but no metaphor can be perfect). The dance or chorus has an established pattern, and each member of the troupe or choir has his or her part. But, unlike on the dark planet, nobody is compelled to join in. Participation is voluntary, and we are even allowed wrong steps and wrong notes while we are learning. So for those of us who have chosen "perfection" is still far from complete. But when it is achieved it will be God's perfection, not the devil, and that makes all the difference between God's new heaven and new earth and a dark planet. Amen.

Peter Sizer

REPENT!

Sermon preached at St. Aethelheard's Orthodox Church, Louth Cemetery Chapel, Divine Liturgy, Sunday January 14, 2001. 30th Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday after the Theophany and Leavetaking of the Theophany.

READINGS: Ephesians 4.7-13; Matthew 4.12-17.

I think today's Gospel must be one of the shortest of the Sunday Gospel readings. There is no story. We are simply told that Jesus left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, and that this was to fulfil a prophecy by the prophet Isaiah. The prophecy is then quoted, culminating in the stirring words: "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light". (Matt. 4.16a, quoting Isaiah 9.2). This is a key phrase, for Jesus is indeed the Light of the World, and it points to the last sentence of today's reading: "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matt.4.17).

This is the real point of the reading. As the feast of our Lord's Theophany (his appearance as God in human form) began with his baptism in the Jordan, so it ends with the beginning of his public ministry. We are not told much about what Jesus preached (though, of course, much more information is given later in St. Matthew's Gospel, and in the other Gospels also). Here we are told simply that Jesus' message was: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

But that is the whole content of the Christian message! For Jesus is the kingdom of heaven; where Jesus is, there is the kingdom. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent and believe the good news.

That is what Jesus preached, and that is what the body of his followers, the Church, preaches too. Beside that everything else is insignificant. The Son of God became man to save us from our sins. Jesus Christ became what we are to enable us to become what he is. Jesus Christ became flesh, born of a virgin. He was baptised by John the Forerunner in the Jordan, sanctifying our baptism. Because of his birth and baptism, his public preaching, his crucifixion and death and his resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven, we who follow him are enabled to enjoy the great future that God always intended for us. And so are all who believe the Church's preaching and turn to the Christian way of living. All who follow Jesus Christ will become children of God by status.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became what we are to enable us to become what he is. The kingdom of heaven, in the person of Jesus himself, is at hand. Repent and believe the good news. That is what Jesus preached and taught, and that is what the Church is called to preach and teach.

Of course Jesus said a great deal also about how we should live lives pleasing to God. Did he not preach his great Sermon on the Mount? So the Church, quite properly, says a great deal in its sermons about how to lead the Christian life. But that is not the essential Christian message. Either we preach Christ born of the Virgin Mary, become man, crucified, risen from the dead and ascended, or we are wasting our time.

Of course we take great care how we serve the Liturgy, because we are doing it for God. We try to do it without mistakes (though we do not always succeed). We want to do our best for God. So some of the Church's sermons are concerned with worship. But in worship we are seeking to please God and not ourselves. The things we do in the Liturgy are not important for their own sake. Our message is Jesus Christ, God become man.

Christian living and worship are proper, and indeed necessary subjects for sermons. But they are relatively insignificant subjects compared with the key Christian message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" That message is needed in every age, and perhaps in this age more than ever.

For to "repent" means to "change one's mind". To change one's whole way of life. Surely never was repentance more needed than today. It is not just a matter of the contemporary world's gross sins; the wars and conflicts, the growth of crime in civilised countries to levels not seen for a century and a half, the decline of personal morality and the breakdown of basic human relationships like marriage and the family.

Consider the sheer absurdity of life in a world in which men and women are trying to go their own way. Only this week there was a report in the newspapers about a teacher at an important public school, a man with a wife and several children, who has just had himself turned into a woman. He intends to go on teaching at the school, which was originally a Christian religious foundation.

There was also a report this week that some American scientists have produced a genetically engineered monkey containing a gene from a jelly fish. I hope it stings them! When we go our own way, instead of doing what God wants us to do, at worst we commit gross sin, and at best we make fools of ourselves.

Of course the scientists were acting in the interests of medical research. If they can genetically engineer monkeys they will be able to make them with human genetically transmitted diseases, and then use them for experiments aimed at finding cures. I am convinced that this modern obsession with medicine and cures is connected with fear of death. Many people nowadays purport not to believe in life after death, but the way they carry on belies this. They want to put off death for as long as possible, because they are afraid of what might happen afterwards.

We Christians are not afraid of death, because we know that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has finally defeated sin and death. Death has no more dominion over us. Nor need anyone fear death who listens to our preaching and believes the message. They have only to do what it says; to repent and follow Jesus Christ.

So it is of vital importance that Jesus' message is preached; and all Christians have a part in preaching it, although not all are called to public preaching and teaching. As St. Paul told the Ephesians, in the passage from his letter read as today's Apostle, God bestows different gifts on each of us. "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4.11-12).

But we all preach the Christian message by the example we set to the people around us, by the whole way we live. We need to show to those around us that we really believe that the kingdom of God is at hand; that they too may repent and follow him whom we serve.

Amen.

Sleeping Christians?

by Fr. Jonathan Hemmings

"Keep awake and pray that you may not enter into temptation. (Matt 26:41) These words of our Lord to His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane are no less an alarm warning for our time and generation. This state of wakefulness and preparedness is achieved through prayer. Now, at the eleventh hour, at our crucial moment we must be aware of the unseen warfare that demands of us a state of constant vigilance.

"Take heed, watch and pray. "The Greek for "take heed" is literally "look out"! The fathers rightfully name this watchfulness as the "eye of the soul."

The sleep of ignorance and indifference as much as the turmoil of business and pride is a real danger for "modern" Christians who may sleep through their Gethsemane and time of trial before Christ comes in glory. Our Holy Liturgy takes place between the two great Icons of the Incarnation and the Judgement of Christ, as does our life. In our worship and prayer life we must be still in order to hear Christ speak to us.

Yet this stillness is not at all the same thing as sleep. Indeed, it is quite the opposite. Stillness comes as a result of watchfulness and prayer and a purifying of the passions generated by the heart. The heart is a silent generator and can be the catalyst of demonic destruction or Divine redemption. That is why we stand in the Liturgy-ready, prepared, waiting on God.

"What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man." Mt. 15:18-20. The prayer of the heart on the other hand warms our intellect with the virtues of mercy and compassion and refreshes the dry rationalism with the well of living waters that springs up from our spirit-endowed soul. The prayer of the mind descending to the heart energises our faith. St. Dionysios the Areopagite calls the return of our intellect to itself and subsequently to the heart, cyclical.

There is a temptation born of pride to think of our social activity is somehow proof of our Christian belief. Whilst we must be doers of the word we must first be hearers. Christ teaches this dynamic which originates in a focussed stillness of the listening heart in his conversation with Martha:

"Martha, Martha you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her. "Luke 10:41-42.

Martha was distracted through "much serving. "Her hospitality, business and fussing had blinded her eyes and deafened her ears to Christ. He had become the object of her duties rather than the subject of her joy. The "eye of her soul" was not fixed upon Jesus, the "author and finisher of faith." Heb. 12:2. Before our hands can do God's work on earth our ears and eyes must be set on heaven.

"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. (Colossians 4:2)

St. John of Kronstadt writes on this passage; "for it is not by variety that the soul is strengthened, but by their (the prayers) constant repetition, and so by their being brought into our heart, into our will and into our whole life."

From the Desert Fathers There were three friends...and the first chose to reconcile those who were fighting against each other, as it is said, "Blessed are the peacemakers. "The second chose to visit the sick. The third went to live in prayer and stillness in the desert.

Now, in spite of all his labours, the first could not make peace in all men's quarrels, and in sorrow he went to the one who was serving the sick and found him also disheartened.

So they went to see the one who was living in stillness and prayer and told him their difficulties. After a short silence he poured water into a bowl and said to them "Look at the water," and it was disturbed. After a while he said: "Look again" and they could see their faces reflected in the still water.

Then he said: "It is the same for those who live among men, disturbance prevents them from seeing their faults; but when a man is still, then he sees his failings."

Fr. Jonathan Hemmings

Celebrating death - The Sting Removed

Late last month the Antiochian Deanery in Britain lost its first Priest, when Father John Nield passed away after a long illness. Within a few days we were remembering the centenary of the death of Queen Victoria, and much was written and said about the Victorian age. One commentator said that the Victorians learnt to "celebrate death". If that is true, then it is a lesson we could well re-discover in the new millennium.

In October a train travelling from London to Leeds was de-railed near Hatfield. Sadly four people were killed. Politicians joined others in throwing their brickbats, and the word "unacceptable" was used ad nauseam by all and sundry. For several months the railways suffered almost rigor mortis. Fear of another accident spread through the system, and trains were reduced to crawling from station to station. It was an extraordinary response.

Of course, there was some substance in the fact that the rail track had deteriorated and needed a great deal of repairing. But at the back of the whole experience was the unacceptability of accidents or the taking of risks, in case of death.

In the same period we have read a lot about the newly discovered dangers of flying. I don't mean the weather, human error or metal fatigue. I mean so called DVT, or deep vein thrombosis. We learnt of all the people being taken off planes at Heathrow and dying quickly of a blood clot to the brain. Having myself travelled a great deal over the years, with some flights lasting over 24 hours, I wonder what I have been spared from! A cartoon appeared in the Evening Standard at the time of a rear gunner in a Lancaster bomber flying over Germany during World War 2. Lines of German fighters are queuing up to shoot at it, and tracer bullets streak across the night sky. He speaks to a colleague gunner, "of course what really scares me is DVT".

Which leads me on to the Kosovo conflict. One was amazed to read of the fear the Americans had of casualties. It was reliably reported that the American public would only accept five or six body bags. Their Air Force would have to be withdrawn if there were more. Last year we remembered the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Britain. No fighter pilot went into action in the summer of 1940 without being very clear that death was a likely possibility.

So in travelling by train or by air, and fighting in a war, death is "unacceptable".

What a contrast with the message of Christ, the apostles and the example of the martyrs! In the Divine Liturgy there is a moment when the Priest draws the curtain, opens the royal doors and sings the initial blessing. It is this moment that the philosopher Prince Evgeny Trubetskoy remembered as he lay dying. Just as he died he cried out, "the royal doors are opening! The Great Liturgy is about to begin." That is a true celebration of death! Bishop Kallistos in his article about death ("Go Joyfully") quotes from the British composer of the last century Ralph Vaughan Williams. When asked "what does the future life

mean to you?" he replied: "Music. But in the next world I shan't be doing music. . . I shall be being it". The Bishop adds the words of T S Eliot, "you are the music while the music lasts" and concludes "in heaven the music lasts for ever."

Another well known 20th Century artist, who, like the composer, had his roots in Victorian Britain, the writer Rudyard Kipling, wrote a poem about death which includes these lines -

"And only the Master shall praise us; and only the Master shall blame; And no one will work for money, and no one shall work for fame."

There he hits on our modern problem - money and fame. Maybe one of the major reasons why death is not mentioned, let alone celebrated in our modern western world, is that so many seem to live for money and fame - and you can't take any of that with you.

St Maximos the Confessor put it well when he wrote, "for every humble person is gentle, and every gentle person is invariably humble. A person is humble when he knows that his very being is on loan to him". There it is in a nutshell. It is true that life is the gift of God, but it is also His loan to us. We should never think of it as a permanent state.

Certainly St Paul didn't. He describes vividly in his Epistles the risks he took in proclaiming the Gospel. He knew that the loan of his life might be claimed by God at any moment. He does write of death as an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). It was not God's original plan for mankind. He quotes the questions of the prophet Hosea about death - "where is your victory. . . where is your sting?" Hosea has no answers, but St Paul did - "the sting of death is sin" he explains, "and the power of sin is the law." Then comes the words which have reverberated at thousands of funerals, "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Fr. Michael Harper

Repentance - The Axe to the Roots

by Father Michael Harper

We have just entered the period of Lent, a time of special repentance. During these weeks the fasting is only a means to an end, our own deeper repentance; if we ignore this, then it will all be in vain. The last Sunday before Lent is called "Forgiveness Sunday", and there is a special service of Vespers, sadly neglected in some parts of the Orthodox Church, which includes the specific asking of forgiveness by the members of the community. This is initiated by the Priest, who asks forgiveness specifically for his shortcomings.

Lent, in a sense, is a return to basics. Lent began as the period for preparing catechumens for their baptism at Pascha (Easter). But it is just as much for us a recovery of the essence of our baptism, the first word of which is "repent". One of the Church Fathers we will be remembering in Lent is St John Climacus. He once wrote, "repentance is the renewal of baptism and is a contract with God for a fresh start in life. Repentance goes shopping for humility and is ever distrustful of bodily comfort... . repentance is the daughter of hope and the refusal to despair".

We see the same in the ministry of John the Baptist, who called people to a baptism of repentance. He addressed his catechumens with radical words, "even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees: every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9). So Lent for us is a time for doing some drastic pruning, and to lay the axe to the roots of our sins, our pride and self-indulgences.

But we should not forget the concept of forgiveness, because it was central in the teaching of Christ, who often contrasted our forgiving others with God's forgiveness of us. It comes, of course, in the Lord's Prayer - "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." We are passing through a period in history when forgiveness has come to the fore. A Christian leader, Lynn Green, recently organised a reconciliation march from France to Jerusalem to ask forgiveness from Muslims, Jews and Eastern Orthodox for the sins of the Crusades. The Pope himself has asked forgiveness for the sins of his Church, including the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. I have also just received notification of a group of Germans who plan to visit every city in Germany where Jewish people suffered during the Jewish holocaust, to ask the forgiveness of the Jews. All this has its place. But sometimes it is easier to ask forgiveness when one was not personally involved, than when one was. And it is this personal need for forgiveness which Lent is all about.

If we go to the heart of forgiveness we shall find that it is closely linked with the question of judging. When we forgive someone we are saying in another way, "I don't judge you". To judge people is to act as "God" to them; it is to by-pass God's sovereignty. God is our judge, and in the final analysis no one else. We are not saying that no one can assess another person, or be wise in discerning their behaviour and acting accordingly. In 2 Timothy 4:14, for example, Paul certainly expected his fellow Christians to exercise such discernment. But to judge someone is like taking them into a court of law, and pronouncing sentence on them. That we must never do.

There is a subtle reason why we like to do this judging in our worse moments. It is because it makes us feel better. Normally there are always people around whom we feel are not as good as we are. So we compare ourselves - condemn others, and so get off the hook ourselves. The famous prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian, said regularly in Lent, shows the right way for us, "grant me to see my own sins, and not to judge my brother."

Saint Dorotheos of Gaza puts it well. "Those who want to be saved scrutinize not the shortcomings of their neighbour, but always their own, and they set about eliminating them. Such was the man who saw his brother doing wrong and groaned, woe is me; him today - me tomorrow".

So some deft wielding of the axe to the roots of our sins this Lent is going to be good for all.

It IS Pascha not Easter!

I hear occasionally from someone who sometimes accuses the Orthodox Church of being "foreign", and so unsuitable for the British. A few days ago he sent me a card saying "the word in English is Easter". My reply was "the word in Greek (and, therefore, English), is Pascha".

This is a much more important subject than a mere dispute about words. If the word in English is Easter, then one is bound to ask "what word?" Was there some word which, when translated into English, became "Easter"? The plain answer is "no". There is one simple reason for this, Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh never visited these shores, and his words were not written in English. He spoke Aramaic, and his sayings were recorded in Greek, as were the words of the other NT writers like Paul and Peter. An example of the desire to replace the word "Pascha" with "Easter" is the King James version translation of Acts 12:4 which describes the arrest of Peter by Herod and his intention "after *Easter* to bring him forth to the people". The Greek word here is *pascha*, and all modern translations rightly now translate the word "passover"

We need to realise also that there is no equivalent word for "Easter" in the Greek language, for one simple but important reason, *the word is an Anglo-Saxon word for a pagan festival*. The word in its original use is entirely pagan. According to the English Church historian Bede, it derives from a pagan spring festival in honour of *Eastra* or *Ostara* a Teutonic goddess. It has no associations whatsoever

with Christ, His death and Resurrection, or indeed anything Christian. Is it not, therefore, unsuitable to be used to describe the greatest day in the life of the Church? The French, Italians and Spanish do not make the same mistake. Their words come from the proper source - Passover, which in Greek is the word "Pascha".

Pascha is derived from the Jewish word *Pesah* which means "Passover". And here there is a direct link with the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 we read, "for our *paschal* lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed". According to St John, Christ was crucified at the very time that the paschal lambs were being killed. There is another link with the Old Testament because of the importance to the Jews of the Feast of the Passover. The verbal form means to protect and to have compassion as well as "passover". The experience of the Israelites was literally a "passover", but it was also an experience of both God's compassion for his people, and a great act of protection, as for example, the passage through the Red Sea. The crucifixion and later Resurrection of Christ took place during the Passover Feast. So for Christians Christ was clearly the *Paschal Lamb*, the fulfilment of all that the Passover had foreshadowed since the first Passover which celebrated the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Let us remember that because the word "Pascha" is in its origin a Hebrew word, by using it we are a witness to the Jewish community, for whom the Passover is still one of the most important words in their religious faith.

Orthodox believers living in the West have always been under pressure in all directions to conform to western ways, ideas and practices. There is nothing new in this. The Crusades were the worst and most blatant attempt by the West to bring the East to heel. But the pressures continue, albeit in more subtle ways. And one example of this is our constant temptation to drop the word "Pascha" and for clarity (and sometimes charity) use the western word "Easter". But perhaps the time has come for us to make a stand against this. In our increasingly secular and pagan society the use of a pagan word, of which no one knows the meaning, is hardly suitable to describe the greatest day in the Christian year. When most people knew the Christian meaning of the word "Easter" one could perhaps make out a case for using the word. But not today!

To be practical

There are still some for whom the word "Easter" has all the right resonances. Let us not want for a moment to deprive them of that blessing. Easter for them does not mean hats, chocolate eggs, parades or watching football; it means the Cross of Christ and his glorious Resurrection.

But let the Orthodox stick to the right word, which is "Pascha". Let us use it in our own circles, and discard the pagan word "Easter". We should do this - not to be different, but to be truthful.

However, when we are in mixed company, for the sake of clarity (and charity) let us use both words, if possible with a simple and humbly presented explanation. For example - "We shall soon be celebrating Pascha - or as you call it 'Easter'". Or, "we shall soon be celebrating Easter, or as we call it 'Pascha'".

We should encourage the West to unite with us in using the right word, which is Pascha.

And finally, let us not get dragged down with a dispute about mere words. St Paul warned believers in his day "to avoid wrangling about words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening" (2 Timothy 2:14). The important matter here is not what the Festival is called, but the reality of the Death and Resurrection of Christ. *Yes, Christ is Risen!* If we can agree there, then what we call it, important though that is, can be seen in its proper perspective.

Father Michael Harper

Pascha 2001

Christ - Light for our Blindness

Sermon preached at St Aethelheard's Orthodox Church, Louth Cemetery Chapel, Divine Liturgy, Sunday May 20, 2001. 6th Sunday of Pascha (Sunday of the Blind Man).

READINGS: - Acts 16.16-34; John 9.1-38. (Edited version of extempore sermon).

"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see."

The last line of that opening verse of a well-known Evangelical hymn (a fairly recent recording of which was so popular it nearly reached the top of the charts) was clearly suggested by the Gospel story we have just heard, about Jesus healing a man blind from birth.

The hymn writer applies the story of the physical miracle of Jesus restoring the sight of a man born blind to Jesus healing our spiritual blindness. But this is a tradition dating back to a time long before there were any Evangelicals (except in the sense that every Christian is called to spread the good news about our Lord Jesus Christ, and so every Christian is an evangelical). It is certainly part of the Orthodox tradition. Besides commemorating the physical miracle, the hymns of the Church services also remind us that Jesus cures our spiritual blindness. For example, the kontakion that we sang a little while ago: -

"I come to you, O Christ, blind from birth in my spiritual eyes, and call to you in repentance: you are the most radiant light of those in darkness."

Indeed, the application of the Gospel story about the healing of the man blind from birth to the healing of spiritual blindness has always been part of the tradition, in both East and West.

We are all spiritually blind from time to time, even the most devout of us. For we all have our periods of doubt, the dark times in our life of faith. Jesus Christ, as both God and man - the God-Man, cures us of our spiritual blindness. For what we learn in the Gospels can only be believed through spiritual insight, by means of an inner eye (as it were). Spiritual insight is available only to those who have entered into union with the Holy Trinity. The inner eye is the gift of God, divine grace offered to us by the Holy Spirit, sent to each one of us by the Father through the Son. We enter into union with the Holy Trinity (however partially and intermittently) as members of the Church. Spiritual insight is available only to baptised Christians.

But spiritual insight, the inner eye is necessary to us. What we learn in the Gospels about Jesus Christ cannot be believed by applying human reason. In fact such notions as that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he cured a man born blind and performed other miraculous healings, and that he rose again from the dead after being crucified, are, from the world's point of view, downright unreasonable. They offend against both science and common sense (and we are hearing a lot about common sense during the General Election campaign!). Women who have never known a man do not have children. People do not rise from the dead. But we believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God become man, was born of the Virgin Mary, lived and preached on earth, was crucified, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. And that in due course he will return to this world in glory! Only spiritual insight, an inner eye, could possibly enable us to believe all this.

Historically, there have been three ways of approaching the problem of belief in the truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. First, there is the Roman Catholic way. Roman Catholics may possess spiritual insight (I'm sure many do). But it is not really necessary. All that is needed is to believe an infallible Church, whose infallibility is secured by its having an infallible leader, the Pope, bishop of Rome, the successor to St Peter, who has inherited from him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. There seems to be almost no place at all for the individual conscience.

Second, since the Reformation in the West in the 15th and 16th centuries, there has been the Protestant way. According to this approach the individual conscience, private belief, is almost everything and the

authority of the Church practically nothing. (There are many different kinds of Protestantism, and for some the authority of the Bible replaces that of the Church. But often the meaning of the Bible is left to individual interpretation!).

Academic research into theology and Biblical studies proliferates, as more and more scholars publish their own opinions. Theology becomes academic research rather than the expression in words of the Church's spiritual experience. In episcopal denominations the bishops more and more resemble a university theological faculty. At the extreme it almost seems as if you need a theological degree at an approved university to get into heaven!

Both these approaches are wrong because they are one-sided. Individual conscience and the authority of the Church are BOTH important, but neither is to be stressed to the exclusion of the other. The third approach is the Orthodox way, which recognises both the authority of the Church and individual conscience.

Like the Roman Catholics, Orthodoxy believes that the Church is infallible. But the Orthodox Church does not believe that any individual is infallible. Not the Ecumenical Patriarch, nor any patriarch, archbishop, bishop or anyone - however spiritual or pious. It is the Church as a whole - bishops, priests, deacons and lay people - that is infallible. The truth is what the whole Church accepts, and every member of the Church - whether belonging to the hierarchy, the clergy or the laity - is responsible for guarding the true faith. Not even ecumenical councils are infallible until their findings have been accepted by the whole Church. That is what makes them ecumenical. It is not the number of bishops attending or the number of local churches represented.

For instance, the First Ecumenical Council, held at Nicaea in 325 to fight the heresy of Arius (who believed that Jesus Christ is a created being) was not called ecumenical until the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381 - 56 years later! By that time its doctrines had been accepted by the whole Church. At the time of the First Ecumenical Council the deacon Athanasius (now one of the greatest of Orthodox saints) stood out alone against practically the whole episcopate.

One Christian - a deacon, but it could equally be a layman or laywoman - can, if need be, constitute the whole Church, the sole defender of the true doctrine handed down by the saints! It does not depend on theological training. Passing examinations does not help here at all. True doctrine is what accords with spiritual experience - that is the experience of the Church, and that of the individual within the Church. The two are inseparable, for individual spiritual experience depends on the spiritual insight we receive as members of the Church. Remember that each baptised Christian has been received into the community of the Holy Trinity. Each is guided by the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father through the Son, to the Church and to each member of it. So each shares in the spiritual experience of the Church and each is a guardian of the Church's teaching.

That has always been the teaching of the Orthodox Church, although sometimes particular hierarchs, influenced by Roman Catholic teaching, have asserted otherwise, or at least behaved as if they believed otherwise. So the Orthodox layman or laywoman is faced with a huge responsibility. He or she may have to oppose the teaching of the patriarch, the bishop or his or her own spiritual father! Nobody is infallible. As an Orthodox Christian I honour the bishop as representing Jesus Christ himself, but at the same time I realise that even nowadays some hierarchs make mistakes.

A former secretary of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius (the Anglican-Orthodox friendship association), who had become Orthodox, resigned and returned to his former role as an Anglican parish priest. He said it is a great thing to be an Orthodox layman, but in this country it is practically impossible. I don't know what made him come to that conclusion, but he was certainly right. How can a very ordinary Orthodox Christian take on the huge responsibility of being a guardian of the faith? It is impossible!

It is impossible to achieve by human effort. But remember that for God all things are possible. The God who cured the man blind from birth (who, according to some of the Church's hymns, could not even distinguish between night and day) can cure our spiritual blindness. The God who also, according to today's Apostle reading, broke the chains of Paul and Silas and enabled them to convert their jailer can provide us with the spiritual insight, the inner eye that we need. We have only to pray that he will.

With or Without the Holy Spirit?

by Fr. Michael Harper

We have just passed through a great period of feasts. The season of Pascha is full of thanksgivings. The Church experiences again what those early Christians felt like when they realised that their Master was not dead but alive. And we have followed all that with the great celebration of the Ascension, and now the joys of Pentecost. What a time it has been!

Since Pascha the Epistle readings have been taken from the Acts of the Apostles. A brilliant concept! We have been recalling the early days of the Church, its staggering growth, but also its sufferings. All this was seen by St. Luke, the author of this remarkable book, as a direct result of that memorable day of Pentecost. We are told that the early Christians were ordered by Christ to do nothing until they had received the power of the Holy Spirit. So in the Acts we read of the fruit of that reception. All they did and said was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The Acts is great reading, but it is not there for us to say "how great those days must have been, how I wish I had lived through them". Rather the stories of conversions, preachings, missionary journeys and rapid church growth are there to inspire us - *for we too have received the same Holy Spirit*. The Church without the Holy Spirit is not the Church. In the Holy Spirit the Church "lives and moves and has its being". But it is sadly possible for individual believers to live as if the Holy Spirit had never come.

In 1968 our Patriarch Ignatius, when he was Metropolitan of Latakia, gave an address at the Assembly of the World Council of Churches. In it he spoke of the Holy Spirit in a striking and memorable way:

Without the Holy Spirit God is far away.

Christ stays in the past,

The Gospel is simply an organisation,

Authority is a matter of propaganda,

The Liturgy is no more than an evocation,

Christian loving a slave mentality.

But in the Holy Spirit

The cosmos is resurrected and grows with the

birth pangs of the kingdom.

The Risen Christ is there,

The Gospel is the power of life,

The Church shows forth the life of the Trinity,

Authority is a liberating service,

Mission is a Pentecost,

The Liturgy is both renewal and anticipation,

Human action is deified.

The Patriarch skillfully shows that there is a difference between being "in the Holy Spirit" and being "without the Holy Spirit". Another way of looking at it is to say "the Holy Spirit makes Christ our contemporary." A good example of this is the incident in the Acts when Peter said to Aeneas, "Jesus Christ heals you, stand up. . ." (Acts 9.33) By that statement of faith, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Christ, through the faith of Peter, continued in the present what He had done in the past. Peter did not say to Aeneas, "what a pity, you are just too late, if Jesus Christ were still around He would have healed you for sure". No, Jesus Christ is always present. He never changes; He still heals sick people.

We need to notice that although there were not two Pentecosts, Christ did give the Holy Spirit on two separate occasions to the disciples. In the first (in John 20) the gift is described as "life", and in the second as "power". So there were in fact two comings of the Holy Spirit after Pascha. The first was on the evening of Christ's Resurrection, when Christ appeared for the first time to the Apostles. After saying (what the Priest often says in the Divine Liturgy) "peace be with you", He breathed on them and said: "receive the Holy Spirit". This contrasts with what happened at Pentecost when Christ poured out the Holy Spirit, and He came as a rushing mighty wind. In John's Gospel it was "breath" or "divine breath," in Greek, *pneuma*, or in other words, life. Remember that in Genesis 2:7 God created man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; now God's Son does the same for the new Creation, the Church. He imparts to them the fruit of his Resurrection. The Church becomes the community of the Resurrection.

But at Pentecost the focus is on mission. Christ promised the Holy Spirit to the disciples. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you", Christ said; and He followed these words immediately with, "and you shall be my witnesses. . ." Returning to what the Patriarch said, we need to think carefully about the difference between the presence and the absence of the Holy Spirit. We must take care to see that the gauge of that presence is not emotional hype. It is to do with all the things the Patriarch mentions - "the power of life," "the life of the Trinity." It is also about the power of love, the strength of faith, and the experience of joy in the midst of hardship and persecution. It is re-living again the Acts of the Apostles. May this Pentecost be a call to us to allow the Holy Spirit to do all this in and through us.

Creation matters

Some years ago a visitor to Mount Athos spotted notices on the trees placed there by one of the monks with the inscription "love the trees". Trees are part of God's creation, some would say one of the most beautiful and expressive, and they are revered on the Holy Mountain. Perhaps this is a good reason why the Prince of Wales has visited Mount Athos twice in recent times.

Because we love God, or try to, we are bound to love what He has made, His Creation. How we handle the creation is now near the top of the political agenda. For example the German Green Party is part of the government in a coalition with the Socialists. Also the question of chemical emissions and their effect on global warming was the subject of the Kyoto Agreement, from which the present Bush Administration in the United States has withdrawn. Animal rights activists sometimes resort to force in order to impress their views on the public. Fox hunting is another live creation issue. Then there is the matter of animal and human cloning. Thus issues involving creation are frequent headline news.

Creation is a part of the Nicene Creed, alongside the Incarnation and the Resurrection. God is declared to be "the maker of heaven and earth", and the Father is said to be the One, "by whom all things were made". When recently the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, claimed the Creation as a Jewish doctrine, he was only partially correct. It is also Christian teaching. In Genesis we read of the Creation, not only of heaven and earth, but of the animal kingdom, and of man and woman. Here we see the equality of the sexes *and the differences*. Men and women were created equal, although the nature of their creation was different, and their roles are different.

These differences are rooted in creation, and respect for creation is part of our worship and life. It is important that we do not look at creation as if God created the earth and imposed some laws which He gave to man to preserve it. It is in the creation itself that we see the divine order. We can break God's laws, although we then have to take the consequences. But creation is not just about a rule book. It is, in and of itself, the expression of the Creator, and you can no more change that than you can change the nature of God. If you do attempt to change or adjust what God has created, then you will impair the whole thing. If you deny the equality of men and women, then you will face fearsome consequences. And if you deny the gender differences, which God has created, you will see gradually the collapse of the social fabric of society, especially that of the family.

In my book *Equal and Different* the debate was deliberately placed substantially in the context of the family. Today the word "family" is used by politicians of all parties in an ambiguous and undefined way, in order to avoid issues like homosexuality and to defend single parenthood in whatever circumstances. But by family I mean a man and a woman (not two men or two women) who are married (that is committed to a life-long relationship), and the children born of that relationship, or legally adopted into it.

In the eight year period since the book was published the family has continued to decline. We now have in this country the most disordered family life in Europe. We have more divorces (double the European average), more single parent families, and more illegitimate children than our European partners. The day is approaching when there will be more children growing up without fathers than with them. The dire warnings of Norman Dennis and George Erdos in their book *Families without fatherhood* published in 1995, have not been headed. In the same year Patricia Morgan's book was published, *Farewell to the Family?* In it she accuses Britain, led by successive governments, of dumping the traditional family for the mother-child state.

Whatever sociologists and politicians may say, our understanding of the family should be rooted in our understanding of creation, and our faith in the fact that creation was not a scientific accident, but the carefully planned act of God the Creator. We believe that man was created in the image and likeness of God, and this means that men and women reflect God's nature.

I want to look at one aspect of the relationship between men and women. I want to begin with the doctrine of the Trinity, where I believe we see both "equality and difference" as the Persons relate to each other. The Persons are co-equal and consubstantial. All three are "true God". It is important also not to separate the Persons in their work. They act together, as we see in both the Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles. At Christ's baptism there was the voice of the Father from heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit as a dove upon Christ. All three are involved together. Although there is no explicit mention of the word "Trinity" in the New Testament, yet there are innumerable mentions of the Persons acting together.

Having said this, it is equally important to see the "hierarchy" of the Godhead. It is the Father who sends the Son, and it is from the Father that the Holy Spirit proceeds (as the Orthodox insist, not from the Father *and* the Son). It is clear also in the New Testament that the Son is in a relationship of obedience to the Father.

This comes out in some of the Johannine discourses, but even more plainly in the teaching of Paul. In his letter to the Philippians Paul declares the equality of the Father and the Son, but goes on to speak of the Son's obedience "to the point of death" (2:6-8).

This is seen even more clearly in 1 Corinthians 15:27-28 where Paul writes, "for God has put all things in subjection under his feet'. But when it says 'all things are put in subjection' it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all". Please note that the "submission" of the Son to the Father is eternal not merely temporal.

There is always a danger if one uses the word "subordination" of falling into the error of the heretics like the Arians, who had a subordinationist Christology, thus denying the co-equal nature of the Father and the Son. But when Paul and others refer to the submission of the Son to the Father they mean *the way the Trinity functions*, not the nature of the Persons. Thus we can dare to say that the Trinity is "equal and different".

In the New Testament The word "submit" is a translation of the Greek verb *hupotasso*. *Hupo* means "under", and *tasso* means to arrange or set or appoint. *It does not convey any sense of inferiority*. But as Paul uses this Greek verb to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son, so in Ephesians 5:22 and Titus 2:5 he uses it to describe the relationship between a husband and wife.

The important point is that "submission" is not only part of the mystery of the Trinity, but is also part of God's creation, and so of normal human relationships. Since man is created in the image of God, this should not surprise us. It is important not to fall into the trap that many seem to, to blame the Fall for the submission of the woman to the man. It had already been established as part of the original Creation (see Genesis 2), being part of the image of the Trinity in mankind. This is clear when we see how Paul interprets Genesis 2 in 1 Tim 2:13 and 1 Corinthians 11:8.

Finally it is important to see the link between all this and the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ, the fullest corporate expression of the glories of the Trinity on earth. The Church is to imitate Christ, not the world. The world, especially in the West has developed strange, sometimes bizarre ideas about human relations in general and the family in particular. These the Church should repudiate. Our vision is to be God-like, and to reflect the glories and wonders of the Divine Trinity, not the vagaries of the world.

"Equality" has been a major source of difficulty in western society for over two centuries. It was the quest for it that lay at the base of both the French and the Russian Revolutions. Tragically millions have bled to death in the pursuit of social and economic equality. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann has written, "the idea that all people are equal is erroneous. . . there is deep falsehood in the principle of comparison which is the basis of the quest for equality. . . equality is based on the denial of any distinctions, but since they exist, the wish for equality calls to fight them, to force equalization on people, and what is even worse to refuse these distinctions." He goes on to say that the essence of love is the total absence of comparison, to quote him - "to the demonic principle of comparison, Christianity opposes love."

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann is exaggerating the error of equality and the quest for it. Men and women are equal as well as different. However, our society has gone so overboard on equality, there is a need to re-emphasise the "different" factor. But in the final sentence he hits the nail on the head, when he describes "comparison" as demonic, and when he states that Christianity opposes it with "love". Without love, the true love which emanates from the Holy Trinity, and which is expressed in the holy alliance of the three Persons, nothing works properly. With it, men and women can rejoice in their equality *and* their differences.

Metropolitan Anthony Bloom in a talk entitled 'On Death' said:-

There is a Russian children's story in which a wise man is asked three questions: What is the most important moment in life? What is the most important action in life? And who is the most important person in life? As in all such stories, he seeks everywhere for an answer and finds none.

Finally he meets a peasant girl who is surprised that he should even ask.

"The most important moment of life is the present - it is the only one we have, for the past is gone, the future not yet here. The most important action in this life is to do the right thing at this present moment. And the most important person in life is the person who is with you at this present moment and for whom you can either do the right thing or the wrong."

That is precisely what is meant by mindfulness of death. The value of the present moment may be realised when someone dear to us has a terminal illness and, more particularly, when we are aware that he or she may be dead within minutes. It is then that we recognise the importance of every gesture and action, then that we realise how slight the differences between what we usually consider the great things in life and those that are insignificant. The way we speak, the manner in which we prepare a tray with a cup of tea, the way in which we adjust an uncomfortable cushion become as important as the greatest thing we have ever done. For the humblest action, the simplest word, may be the summing up of a whole relationship, all the love, concern and truth that are within it.

If only we could perceive the urgency of every moment in the awareness that it may be the last, our life would change profoundly. The idle words that the Gospel condemns (Matt. 12:36), all those statements and actions that are meaningless, ambiguous or destructive - for these there would be no place. Our words and actions would be weighed before they were spoken or performed, so that they might be a culminating point in life and express the perfection of a relationship, never less.

Only awareness of death will give life this immediacy and depth, will bring life to life, will make it so intense that its totality is summed up in the present moment. Such precisely is the way in which the ascetics fought against mindlessness, lack of attention and carelessness, against all the attitudes which allow us to miss the moment of opportunity, to pass the other person by, not to notice the need. One of the chief things that we are called upon to learn is awareness - awareness of our own self and of the other person's situation, an awareness that will stand the test of life and death. All life is at every moment an ultimate act.

The Archbishop's Christmas message (2001)

"But after faith is come we are no longer under a school master for we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ." Galatians 3:25-27.

"But as many as received Him, to them he gave the power to become sons of God even to them that believe on His name." John 1:12

The event which took place today at Bethlehem, in a humble crib within a cave, is that of the Birth of the Infant Jesus, of the Incarnation of God. He is made Man in order to open the gates of Paradise to fallen man, driven as he has been out of the house of the Heavenly King. The star appearing in the East is the sign of victory over sin and of the defeat of Satan. It is a sign for the world. The more we take account of this truth the more we will appreciate the true value of God's gift; it alone can give us the resources for the struggle to reach a new life of freedom from the grip of fear and anxiety. Indeed, as God's children by faith in Jesus, we have acquired new life in the Spirit. Because of this it is now possible for us to live in communion with God and our neighbour in love, holiness and goodness.

Born in a lowly cave, Jesus came to free human beings, renewing in them the image of God that was darkened by sin. He invites us to strengthen our bonds with the church He Has founded. It calls us to realise and live out what is noblest in us. By His coming Jesus has spread the light of the knowledge of Him over all the world. He has brought to the one who believes in Him a life of peace. Only He can give this boundless peace.

The divine Infant, born in a mean cradle, has put on the nature of man in order to make it possible for men to enter into a relationship with the One who created them. He offers them a life that enables them to taste the glory of God and actively associate with His divinity. He has become human like us in order to sanctify us and cause us to share in the very dignity of God. Because of that he invites us to His table to take part in the great feast of the heavenly Kingdom. There, Luke the Evangelist tells us in the parable of the marriage feast, all are invited without exception, rich and poor, noble and depraved, the great and the lowly of this world, the wise and the foolish. The heavenly King has invited all those there at the Feast, through His Son Jesus, the Mediator; the intervention of prophets, saints, and just men of old have also played a part. And God continues now to make His offer ceaselessly as He speaks through pastors and teachers of the church saying "Come. All is ready."

The gathering of believers in Jesus are invited to the heavenly Feast. Those refuse who prefer the ephemeral things of this world to the joy from above. They refuse the grace of God which calls them to become His children. For that reason "none of these men who were invited shall taste of My supper." Lk 14:24.

The heavenly Father does not exclude anyone. He gives all of us His peace and showers us all with His blessings, His grace and the riches of His spiritual gifts. He asks us all, for his love surpasses all understanding and is the same for all. We have only to accept his Word and put it into practice. By a life of putting these virtues into practice - of integrity, holiness and faith - we will be in a position to respond to his invitation and share in the heavenly glory. The divine light that came from the cave at Bethlehem lights up the darkness of evil and causes it to flee. We must walk in this light if we are to have a place at the heavenly Table. There we will enjoy the blessings of God, and the good things which are eternal.

All those who know their conscience has been "made white" - lit up - through the light of the knowledge of God, this has been because their lives have been led according to the gospel and teaching of Jesus, their lives are anchored in Christ by a solid and deep faith. These are the ones who are invited to the heavenly Feast. They are the ones who will share in the riches which await them there. Their offerings are acceptable to God and they will be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

In commemorating the Birth of Jesus we ought to invite Him to be born in our hearts. "All of us who have been baptised in Christ have put on Christ." By His abundant grace He gives us the strength of a life lived in Him and strength to share in his work. As He has affirmed in his Gospel "He that believeth on me . . . out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" John 7 v 38. Or again "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life" John 8:12.

Christmas 2001

Archbishop Gabriel
Metropolitan of Western and Central Europe