

Archive 2005

Waves and waters – cursings or blessings?

A sermon preached by Father Michael Harper in St Botolph's Orthodox Church in London on January 2nd 2005

This Sunday there is a strange coincidence – while the world rightly mourns the terrible losses sustained by the Indian Ocean Tsunamis a few days ago – we thank God for the blessings of water at the Feast of the Theophany.

In 1755 an Atlantic Tsunami devastated the city of Lisbon causing the deaths of over 60,000 people. Not a few Christians saw this as the judgement of God on the sinful Portuguese, an expression of the anger of God. The French atheist philosopher Voltaire was so upset by such statements that he wrote his famous book *Candide*, which satirises religious faith.

There were some Moslem clerics who declared that the recent earthquake and resulting tsunamis were Allah punishing the sins of Moslems. And no doubt there will be Christian fundamentalists who will say the same thing – that it was the judgement of God on Islam, although in fact many Christians lost their lives in Sri Lanka. This does seem to be the view of some of the writers of the Old Testament who suffered similar disasters. Job speaks of "the pillars of the heavens quake aghast at his rebuke; by his power He churned up the sea." Jonah spoke during his experience in the storm, "You have overwhelmed me with all your waves". But God taught Elijah that He was not in the earthquake or the whirlwind that destroys, but in the still small voice that brings comfort and healing.

In the New Testament we see Jesus Christ rebuking the wind and the waves in the storm on the lake, as if they were an attack of the enemy, and Jude refers in his Epistle to "the wild waves of the sea casting up the foam of their own shame."

The Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, writing in *The Times*, states that the religious response to such happenings is not to seek to understand, and thereby to accept for he writes - "we are not God". He goes on "instead we are the people He has called on us to be his partners in the work of creation. The only religious response is to say, 'God, I do not know what You want of us: to help the afflicted, comfort the bereaved, send healing to the injured, and aid those who have lost their livelihoods and homes'. We cannot understand God, but we can strive to imitate His love and care."

He then goes on to quote the story of Noah, and God's first covenant with mankind. God had seen a world filled with violence and wanted the world to have a second chance as it were. So Christians everywhere can see this disaster in terms of blessings as well as cursings.

But we need to see in the Scriptures that the Jews had no enthusiasm for the sea. They were essentially landlubbers. God had created the seas, and separated the land from the waters of the seas. But in both the Old Testament and the New the sea is a symbol of evil, which brings us to our main theme - the Theophany.

In Revelation 21 we read about the New Heaven and the New Earth, "and there was no more sea". The evil is eliminated in the world to come. We should also notice that the darkness is also taken away, another symbol of evil.

But in the centre of the New Heaven and New Earth is "the river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God". In the Bible the river is the symbol of life – eternal life, thus Christians are baptised in water, sometimes river water – but never in the sea.

And at this Feast we commemorate the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan. His baptism is the foundation and model for all Christian baptisms.

Let us notice three main aspects of this Feast of Christ's baptism:

In the Orthodox Church Theophany has usually been regarded as a more important Feast than that of Christmas, unlike the western Church, which normally majors on Christmas.

We see in the story of Christ's baptism the first recorded manifestation of the Trinity – the voice of the Father, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the presence of the Son. This is a major reason for its importance.

We see here in this baptism the coming of the Holy Spirit on Christ – and the Church whenever it has been true to its Lord and Master invokes the Holy Spirit at every baptism with the sacrament of chrismation following the baptism. The western Church has always delayed the sacrament of the coming of the Holy Spirit to a later date – to what is often called "confirmation".

In the earlier history of this Feast the title was in the plural "Theophanies" – to stress the Trinitarian nature of Christ's baptism and so of ours.

To conclude – we know scientifically why there are earthquakes and tidal waves – but we do not know how God the Creator fits into all this, so we should hesitate in using the language of anger and judgement to describe what happened a few days ago.

But we do, thank God, know the answers to baptism – it is about total blessing; about burial with Christ; about resurrection with Christ; about being clothed with Christ, putting Him on; about cleansing from our sins; and about the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives. Praise be to God!

Blessed are the risk-takers, for they shall receive their reward!

A sermon preached by Father Michael Harper in St Botolph's Orthodox Church in London on February 6th 2005

This Sunday is called the "Sunday of the Talents"; I would suggest that a better and more accurate title should be "Sunday of the Risk-takers." Today the word "talent" usually means natural gifts. So a "talent spotter" is a person who goes looking for people who excel in sport, academia, marketing and so on. But the Parable of the Talents, which is the reading for the Gospel for this Sunday, is nothing to do with talents as we understand them today. Amazingly some Bible commentators make this mistake. For the men who are given "talents" are in fact given some capital; but it is never theirs – it always belongs to their Master.

In the Greek language the word for interest, or usury as it used to be called, is *tokos*, which literally means "offspring". When it is linked with the Greek word for God – *Theos*, it is a prominent name for the Mother of God. The title "Theotokos" comes frequently in the Divine Liturgy. Interest or usury, in other words is the fruit of capital investment, its "offspring"; money and capital should be seen as living things. The third servant, who took the capital given to him and hid it in the ground, treated the capital as "dead" – for you only bury dead things. Professor Tasker writes that "interest is the child of capital."

Two approaches to investment

Let us now look at this Parable and apply it to two diametrically different approaches to lending. This weekend the G7 leaders from the seven most prosperous nations in the world are meeting in London. Our Prime Minister Tony Blair and the Chancellor Gordon Brown are putting forward proposals for

further investment in Africa. They are suggesting a figure of £1 billion as this country's contribution. Professor Niall Ferguson, the Professor of History at Harvard University in the United States, wrote an article on this subject which was published yesterday in the *Daily Telegraph*. He reported that in the period 1950-1995 over \$1 trillion has been given to Africa in Aid, with pitiable results. Much of this vast sum of money has leaked back to the West either in the form of large investments in Swiss Banks, or as large sums spent on armaments, which have been bought from the West. The Professor writes that

about 80% of all this Aid since the 50s has in fact flowed back to the West. If the West were to be judged on the principles of the Parable of the Talents, it would be categorised as the servant who hid his talents in the ground.

The second approach is as different as chalk from cheese. Some years ago an Englishman went to Africa determined to help poor Africans in their personal economic situations. Where he saw an economic need he personally lent that person a capital sum of money. For instance a man who was marketing his produce, he would lend him, say, £100 to buy a decent market stall. The sums were always quite small, always personally given, and always treated as a loan. He told the people that he would come back in a year or so and reclaim the loan. He reported that very seldom was that money not returned to him, and that in most instances the free loans greatly benefited those who received them, and had helped to lift them out of abject poverty.

I think you will agree with me that this is a better way of doing it – and fits well into the category of the first two in the Parable who were commended for the way they had handled the capital loans, producing good results from their investments.

Risk is the key to this Parable

At the heart of this Parable is the element of risk, which is always part of financial enterprise and any investment policy. The first two servants took risks; the third didn't. And Jesus Christ, in telling this Parable, is encouraging us to take risks.

So let us look at some risk-takers.

St Paul

The first that springs to mind is St Paul because of the Epistle reading for this Sunday. In describing his ministry St Paul tells the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 6), about his constant risk-taking – he writes "through great endurance, afflictions, hardships, beatings, hunger . . . honour and dishonour . . . treated as impostors and yet true, as dying and see we are alive, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor, yet making many rich, as having nothing, and yet possessing everything".

Why all this risk-taking? Because Paul refused to hide in the ground what God gave to him, the glorious gospel of the grace of God, but like the faithful servants in the Parable he traded the gospel which produced for him and the Church many "offspring" – and much suffering.

St Peter

For the second risk-taker, let us recall the behaviour of St Peter on the Day of Pentecost. At 9 o'clock in the morning the gathered Church was filled with the Holy Spirit, and overflowed with worship and joy. They might well have claimed a few days off to enjoy what they had just received, but instead they were confronted, after Peter's sermon, with a crowd of 3000 people who wanted to become Christians. Can't one hear some of the apostles going to Peter and urging him to be cautious. "Peter be careful! 3000 people will swamp the Church. They will take it over. They will lower our standards and corrupt our teaching. Let's just receive a few at a

time, so we can keep control of the situation." Thank God, Peter took no notice of them – 3000 raw recruits were baptised and added to the Church in one day.

His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV

The third example is contemporary and close to hand. Ten years ago our beloved Patriarch was faced with a situation when a number of former Anglican priests wanted to become Orthodox. No doubt the same arguments we imagined on the Day of Pentecost were used against our being received. "They will spoil our Church. They will bring their Anglican heresies with them. They will lower our Orthodox standards." But to his eternal credit the Patriarch ignored all such arguments, and took the risk.

Risk-taking is at the heart of the Christian Faith. Someone once said that for Christians, faith is spelt R – I - S - K. Jesus, again and again emphasised risk, and took enormous risks himself. He risked the future of the Church by appointing the Twelve, one of whom was to betray Him. Jesus once described risk in these words, "those who find their life shall lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

The day of judgement

The warm approval in this Parable of the first two servants, the "well done" of the Master, is unique in both the NT and the LXX. The words, "enter into the joy of your Master" are also unique in the NT. But how will we get on when Christ returns at the end of the age?

Let the Orthodox be careful. The danger will be that we will claim to have "preserved the faith of the apostles" – to have kept it untarnished and intact after 20 centuries, as if that is the sum total of our stewardship. Rightly in the Divine Liturgy we pray that God may "preserve the fullness of the Church."

But in essence, as this Parable teaches us, the Church is not basically a preservation society, though it does preserve the fullness of the Church. It is a caring and sharing body of people who, while preserving faithfully the apostle's doctrine, do not hide that teaching in the ground, but share it with all and sundry, as Peter, Paul and His Beatitude have done from the 1st Century to the 21st. Like them we are to be risk-takers, and when we are – we will not lose our reward.

The Triumph of Orthodoxy

A sermon preached by Father Michael Harper in St Botolph's Orthodox Church in London on 20th March 2005

In the Gospel reading the story is told of Nathanael's encounter with Christ through the intervention of Andrew. Nathanael says to Andrew, "can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" The straight answer is "come and see". There could be no better passage than this one to explain the Triumph of Orthodoxy. The controversy over the icons, which is the background to this Feast, was essentially about the Incarnation – the fact that the coming of Christ means that we can now see God. When Nathanael went to meet Christ – he saw God, not a spirit but a bodily presence. The Word had been made flesh.

The importance of Saturday

When I was a young boy Saturday and Sunday were very distinctive. On Saturday one did one's shopping and went to football matches, and Sunday was a day of rest – the shops were closed and there was no sport.

Now there are no such distinctives.

But in the Orthodox Church the distinctives are very important. Saturday is a day of rest for two reasons. First, because on Holy Saturday Christ rested in the tomb before breaking out of it the following day. And secondly, because God rested on the seventh day after He had created the universe. So the Orthodox remember the dead in Christ on Saturday, knowing that Sunday is the day of resurrection. But we can also see the link between Creation and the New Creation in Christ which reaches its climax on the day of resurrection.

The Iconoclasm controversy

The background to the Triumph of Orthodoxy is the so called Iconoclasm controversy, which spanned about 120 years. In 726 the Emperor Leo III began the attack on icons, which led to the destruction of many of them across the Empire. It was the Empress Irene who halted it in 780. Seven years later the 7th and last Ecumenical Council met in Nicaea and declared icons were acceptable as a means of worship.

However the Iconoclasts did not accept the Council and further attacks were made from 815 during the reign of Leo V, who was an Armenian Emperor. The Triumph of Orthodoxy commemorates the action of the Empress Theodora in 843 who ordered the Council decision to be followed.

It is interesting that the two Champions in this battle were both women.

The Theological battle

The two most prominent theological champions were St John of Damascus, an Antiochian, and St Theodore of Stoudios. It was ironic that St John benefited from the protection of the Muslims in Damascus; the Byzantine Emperors could not touch him.

The heart of the controversy was not about icons, but about the Incarnation. There is no doubt that the Iconoclasts were encouraged by both Muslims and Jews, who did not believe that God could ever be depicted in human form. But when we look closely we become aware that it is the Incarnation that most fundamentally divides Christians from Judaism and Islam. Christians believe that Christ was God in human flesh; Islam and Judaism deny this.

St John of Damascus wrote about this:

Of old God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was not depicted at all. But now that God has appeared in the flesh and lived among humans, I make an image of the God who can be seen. I do not worship matter, but I worship the Creator of matter, who for my sake became material and deigned to dwell in matter, who through matter effected my salvation. I will not cease from worshipping the matter through which my salvation has been effected.

The heresy of Gnosticism

Gnosticism is arguably the most damaging heresy of all. St Irenaeus wrote his famous book *Against the Gnostics*, but the same heresy is as prevalent today as it has ever been. A Canadian Presbyterian has recently written a book entitled *Against the Protestant Gnostics*, which shows how widespread it is in much Protestant thinking and practice.

Gnosticism basically teaches that matter is evil, so one can see how this comes into direct conflict with both the doctrine of Creation and the Incarnation and the practice of the sacraments.

The defenders of Orthodoxy were at pains to point out that the reverence for icons is not a form of idolatry. For instance Leontius of Neapolis in the 7th century wrote:

We do not make obeisance to the nature of wood, but we revere and do obeisance to Him who was crucified on the Cross. . . . When the two beams of the Cross are joined together, I adore the figure because of Christ, who was crucified on the Cross, but if the beams are separated, I throw them away and burn them.

One of the great teachers of that period was St Theodore Stoudios who wrote about this matter:

Of old God was not depicted at all. But now that God has appeared in the flesh and lived among humans, I make an image of the God who can be seen. I do not worship matter, but I worship the Creator of matter who for my sake became material and deigned to dwell in matter, who through matter effected my salvation.

Christ is the God who can be seen, and people like Nathanael can "come and see" Him.

When I was an Anglican Priest in London in the 60s, a Jewish man called Mr Mittler came to see me, and said that he wanted to be baptised and become a Christian. When I asked him what had brought him to this decision, he told me that his hobby was art, and he had visited most of the major museums in Europe. Through the years he had become haunted by the face of Christ depicted on icons, paintings and murals. It was that face of Christ which drew him to want to become one of his followers.

These words from Mattins stress the importance of this day:

The icon is a song of triumph and a revelation – an enduring monument to the victory of the saints and the disgrace of the demons.

Can any good thing come out of Antioch? A Tenth Anniversary

by Father Michael Harper

The plain answer to this question is – yes; the Church in Antioch was founded by St Peter and St Paul. Then there were St Barnabas, St Ignatius, St John Chrysostom and St John of Damascus to quote the most famous. As far as this country is concerned one can mention also St Theodore of Tarsus, arguably the most effective and most influential Archbishop of Canterbury in the history of the office.

But St Theodore was a one off. After him, right up until the 20th Century, Antioch has been conspicuous by its absence in this country. However we need to remember that the other jurisdictions had little or no presence here from the Great Schism until the last Century. If people in this country know very little about the Greek and Russian Orthodox, they will know virtually nothing about the Antiochian Orthodox.

The Patriarchate of Antioch seemed in the 19th century to be in terminal decline. However, new health and vigour came about through two major changes. Before 1898 the Antiochian Patriarch and the senior Priests were all Greek, but in that year an Arab Patriarch was appointed, and today all the Antiochian Priests in the Middle East are Arabs. The second change took place with the setting up in 1942 of the Orthodox Youth Movement, which helped to revive the Patriarchate, and leaders emerged from this Movement, including the present Patriarch, His Beatitude Ignatius IV. Today there is vibrant life in the

Patriarchate in Lebanon and Syria, and a revival of the monastic life, with the creation of a number of new monasteries, one of which is only open to graduates.

The Antiochian *diaspora* is spread over several continents, with over half a million in North America, and a growing and expanding presence in Australia, and South America. The Antiochian Patriarchate was first planted in this country about twenty years ago, when as a result of the Lebanese civil war and other pressures in the Middle East, a growing number of immigrants settled here. There are around 15 million Arab Christians in the world, and a number of Orthodox from Lebanon and Syria decided there should be a Church in London at which they could worship. St George's Cathedral was leased and services have been held there, largely in Arabic, for over twenty years. The present Priest, Father Samir Gholam, is Lebanese.

A new and unusual situation developed in 1995 through the creation in England (and subsequently Ireland as well) of a network of English speaking communities. All this took two years or so to come to fruition. The process began in early 1993 when the Pilgrimage to Orthodoxy was set up by a small group of Anglicans, who had decided to leave the Church of England and seek to become Orthodox. I was invited to be the President of this group, and our initial contacts and support came from Metropolitan Philip of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America. Some of us visited his headquarters in New Jersey towards the end of 1993. He commissioned a Priest, Father Michael Keiser, to come over to this country regularly to catechise us, and help us to set up a Deanery.

The links with North America caused some concern, so our Patriarch, His Beatitude Ignatius IV, placed us under his protection, and linked us with Bishop Gabriel, who lived in Paris and was then the Vicar-General for the Antiochian Church in Western Europe. It has since become a Diocese and he is now our Archbishop. In a historic moment in September 1994, a group of us went to Paris to meet our Patriarch in our Bishop's apartment, and he held out his arms to us and welcomed us "home". Many of us wept with joy.

In March 1995 my wife and I were received into the Orthodox Church. Three days later we went to Paris and I was ordained Deacon by Bishop Gabriel in the Greek Cathedral. Two weeks later we were to return, and on April 1st I was ordained Priest. Who says the Orthodox Church can't move fast! I was ordained on April Fools' Day, and it has been a comfort ever since to know that the Orthodox do have a place for fools for Christ. We celebrate this year our tenth anniversary.

The policy of the Deanery has been straight-forward from the first – we are whole-heartedly committed to being a Church in which English people can feel at home, with our services in English, and our goals to help to bring our country back to God and its ancient Christian heritage. Equally we welcome all Orthodox as true partners with us in this task. We do not believe that culture or ethnicity should ever divide Christians. But if we are to have a Christian influence to our fellow countrymen, the language has to be English.

We have also from day one sought to work as closely as possible with all Orthodox. It was to me symbolic that at my ordination in Paris, a Greek Bishop was present, and was the one who directed me around the Holy Table. The Deanery has played a full part in the setting up of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge. I was myself present at all the early meetings, and the Patriarchate and Deanery have been amongst the most generous donors. This has also been true of the new course "The Way", which has several Antiochians on the committee and amongst the speakers. Many of us were present at the Swanwick conference last summer, where the goal of one Orthodox jurisdiction was made clear, and we are committed to that goal.

As Antiochians we have an advantage – we are named after a city and not an ethnic group. Ethnically the Patriarchate is Arab, but the leadership everywhere encourages the development of national bodies. In North America, the Antiochians see themselves, even if they are Arabs, primarily as Americans. This appeals to the public, and the Church is now growing fast, and incorporating more and more Americans who are not Arabs. It was the Antiochians who welcomed the 2000 American Evangelicals who wanted

to join some years ago. It was a risk, but, I believe, it has paid off. The Patriarch, in welcoming them "home" humbly asked them to bring their gifts with them, which they have done, and evangelism is becoming rightly an important ministry in the Archdiocese.

For Antiochians a favourite text is Acts 11:26, "it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians." The Patriarchate has become very cosmopolitan in the last hundred years, as it was in the beginning. It needs to be remembered that it was from Antioch that Paul and Barnabas began their missionary journeys, which were to spread eventually to Rome itself. The Patriarchate today is rediscovering its missionary heritage, and as we thank God for the blessings of the first ten years, we desire to develop that same vision in our Deanery.

The Re-Hallowing

Fr. Chrysostom MacDonnell

When the British Deanery of the Antiochian Orthodox Church was set up in this country, there was one, very firm aim in the minds of its architects: nothing less than the re-hallowing of the whole of Britain through the recovery of her original Orthodox faith. There was an erroneous but understandable notion at the time, that we, as concerned Anglicans, (soon to abandon Anglicanism) who wished to remain within the clear bounds of Apostolic Tradition, should seek a home in the Roman Catholic Church.

For most of us (over ten years ago, now) who, in our latter Anglican days, were watching the disintegration of what we had once imagined to have been the catholic church of this land, by Law Established, safe under the Elizabethan Settlement, the break could not come soon enough. It was not just the single issue of the proposed ordination of women to the presbyterate that bothered us. Yet, somehow, that controversy did serve as a warning light. It was clear that an ecclesial body that could countenance such a departure from apostolic order could not be, in essence, a true church in the apostolic succession. Though the form was there, the substance was not. At that time, I clearly remember thinking that the Church of England was like the emperor in the story of *The Emperor's New Clothes*, only this time things were reversed: the clothes were there but it was the emperor who was missing! Yet neither was the Roman Church any more attractive, for it was out of those very scholastic controversies of the Reformation that the Anglican communion had grown and her problems had their own roots deep in Roman Catholic theology. To become Roman Catholic would merely be a return to the root of the same problem.

It was, rather, the discovery that the Church Our Lord founded, the Church discovered in the pages of the New Testament, was not to be sought beside the Tiber; was not a church yet to come through some super-ecumenical conglomeration, but was there all along in the Eastern Orthodox Church. For those who thought such a choice was alien, even far too oriental for Englishmen to enter, we realised that it was the same Church of our forefathers; essentially the same as that present in our land during her Celtic and Anglo-Saxon periods of history. Meanwhile, the dismantling of Apostolic Christianity in Britain has been a long and slow process. It had begun with the brutal Norman Conquest, destroying in its wake the Anglo-Saxon Church. However, the pace of the dismantling of Britain's Christian culture has quickened in the last forty years. It is for this very reason that the aim of our Deanery, (approaching the tenth anniversary of its establishment,) has not changed. In fact, the need for the re-hallowing of Britain grows ever more urgent and for a variety of reasons. In this article I wish to enumerate a few of the reasons why this is a matter of the utmost urgency at this time.

The social changes since the Second World War have broken up traditional networks in our nation. For the most part, these changes have come from the greater mobility of people and the possibility of 'moving away' to find work. For many, the War opened up the world and drew them away from their root communities. Although, for the adventurous, this has meant a wider world, it has entailed a concomitant breaking of ties to place and a real sense of belonging and identity.

The gradually liberalising trends in social and sexual morality since the 1960's have undermined previously accepted codes of behaviour. Like all such movements, demands for the greater acceptability of and tolerance towards what, previously, had been seen as immoral have produced their generally destructive fruits. It was cogently argued that 'old fashioned' attitudes produced stigma and social isolation for those at odds with accepted moral norms. To have sexual relations before marriage, to give birth to an illegitimate child; to be born outside wedlock; to live in cohabitation without marriage; to expect the availability of easy divorce; to be openly homosexual, it was argued, should not entail social censure. Yet the direct result of the social acceptance of these new 'norms' appears to have produced no greater sum of human happiness, a disintegrated family structure, a lack of security for the young and a downright climate of fear in regard to sexual health.

The steady decline of family structures, brought on by changes in attitudes towards divorce and cohabitation, has been an interesting yet painful phenomenon to observe over the last twenty of so years. So complete has been the reversal in mores that it is now, certainly, politically incorrect and, deemed virtually immoral, to disapprove of cohabitation; that somehow sexual experimentation and 'trial relationships' before the full commitment of marriage is somehow the only logical solution. Yet, for all this trial and error, the divorce rate continues to increase!

The commercial pressures have fostered more materialistic attitudes towards life in general. In one sense this has always been true and there have always been those who have set their heart on this world's goods. Yet, for the vast majority now, the loss of spiritual goals - even if only expressed in some vague notion that if you are good you will go to heaven - has meant that the only good is the utilitarian and material good. Expectations of goods through ubiquitous advertising, freely available credit and the continuous commercial opportunities of twenty-four hour shopping have posited a values system based solely on ownership desirability.

The changes in work patterns have had a detrimental effect on communal, family and religious life. The current economic demands on family budgets, together with ever-increasing borrowing and the free access to easy credit have fuelled a consumer economy of unprecedented proportions. Workloads have therefore increased, pressurised by the ceaseless demands for more and more money to finance ever-expanding and usually, unrealistic life styles. People work longer and longer hours, often never observing any day of real rest. Yet, the net result has not seen any increase of job satisfaction nor any greater feeling of creative contentment. Even increased technology, once vaunted as the liberator of mankind, has paradoxically, only served to increase available work time to the detriment of social and family life. With Sunday, now a working day for many, times and seasons begin to lose their potency and thus, thrust into the ordinary work-day world on every conceivable occasion, the demands of formalised religion must fall by the wayside.

The increased isolation of individuals, through the breakdown of both traditional social networks (such as belonging to a trade union) and a sense of local and regional belonging, have largely privatised and fragmented much of our society. This gives little natural soil for any national religious sense to grow. In fact, the more people live individualised lives - through greater freedom to divorce or some perverted, narcissistic sense of the autonomy of the individual, the less religion can bind people together. We live in an age when spirituality - of the supermarket, pick-and-mix variety, has never been a more readily available option. Yet religion, from its Latin root meaning to re-tie or bind again, daily loses its power to link a largely fragmented society.

The rapid collapse of the influence of the national (established) Church, through its accommodation to the current mores and post-modern social attitudes, is perhaps, one of the most tragic of all our pieces of evidence. The Church of England's collective loss of nerve since the nineteen-sixties, together with its own innate secularist tendencies have, virtually, guaranteed its eventual demise. Riven by party strife from its inception, it was, perhaps, inevitable that factionalism and modern controversies over women's ordination, homosexuality and the contemporary heresy of Ecumenism (in the sense that the real Church has yet to be realised on earth,) would leave it a floundering rump of its former self. The Roman Church has long overtaken it in communicant numbers, so in what sense is it still the church of the

nation? At times, now, it seems, that only the Monarch's loyalty to the institution is maintaining any credibility to which it can still cling. In short, the Church of England's history over the past forty years have largely contributed to the secularisation of Britain where once, the sleeves of its all enveloping surplice had hallowed every square foot of the land.

The lack of national cohesion, in part advanced by multi-culturalism has evidently been disastrous for the English sense of identity. The post-modern disparaging of anything historical, traditional and above all, English, has the makings of something very dangerous in the political field. The present government has a deep mistrust of anything English which, in part, explains their enthusiasm for the European project. Despite protests to the contrary, does anyone really believe that beneath the promotion of the European Constitution and the ultimate aim of accepting the Euro currency, there is not the idea of an eventual United State of Europe? To an extent, this explains also the Deputy Prime Minister's desire to create regional parliaments for the so-called English regions: what better way to disempower the notion of English identity than to 'Balkanise' the whole land. The net result has been the appearance of an ugly and corrupt expression of nationhood through football hooliganism and the emergence of the British National Party as the fruit of housing estate alienation.

Similarly, the multi-cultural experiment has been an utter disaster. The farcical disparaging of Christian culture by politically correct local authorities (with the bogus plea that they do not wish to cause offence to non-Christian residents!) has only increased a general feeling of injustice when we know, full well, that such bending over backwards to accommodate the foreign into English life, is not reciprocated (nor should it be!) abroad. In particular, the influence of Islam in Britain has been pernicious. There is no point in trying to reach an accommodation or *modus vivendi* between Christians and Muslims in this country, for, Islam, in its religious beliefs and values, is anti-Christian and its claims to be the final revelation from God must be dismissed clearly by Christians. The naive assertions by certain politicians that Islam is a 'religion of peace' can only spring from a deep ignorance of the religion and one presumes that they have never read the Qur'an. Let us state it bluntly: yes, Islam is a religion of peace within the Ummah itself; like any religious system it has evolved a social pattern that makes for its inner cohesion, else it would not survive at all. The point is, Islam is a polity as much as a religion and as such, cannot rest until it has taken root over all the earth. Unlike, Christianity, its kingdom is very much of this world, by violence where necessary and, as such, its presence here can only be detrimental to our freedoms. This is in no way implying that law-abiding Muslims subjects of this country pose an immediate threat to our democracy, but thinking in historical terms (which our present Government cannot understand,) a generally pervasive Islamic influence will eventually change the ethos of parts of this country. For the same reasons, Christians should oppose the entry of Turkey into the E.U.

Bearing this in mind, we have to admit that there are shameful episodes of forced conversion in Christian history as well, though Orthodox Christians have a particular perspective here. After all, it was the schismatic Papacy in the Middle Ages that fostered the appalling episodes of Crusading in the Holy Land. This, in turn led, eventually, to the downfall of Constantinople, the very heart of Orthodoxy itself.

Faced therefore with this challenge there can be only one aim and duty for Orthodox Christians in England and the rest of the U.K. Lets be blunt again: we have to evangelise among British Muslims and bring them to know Christ as God to save their souls. To be honest at this stage, I do not think vast hordes of English people will be converting to Islam, apart from a few isolated marriage arrangements and the odd few misguided souls on a spiritual search. But think in terms of the future - Islam will spread here, not least, through a higher birth rate. Muslim people in Britain do not practice abortion and contraception on the scale current among the present Anglo-Saxon generation - an aging population - who have come to see sex merely as a form of entertainment or recreation and have largely abandoned family values. I will though, state it again, lest anyone through lack of understanding or from nefarious motives, misunderstand me: our issue with Islam is theological and not with Muslims themselves *per se*.

The failure of education to promote a positive national identity and, above all, its abandonment of narrative history, has also served the fragmentation of our culture. The replacement in schools of teaching, in the main, historical skills of investigation (only really appropriate at degree level) instead of the story of the nation has, on the whole, left children profoundly ignorant with little sense of what they inherit of a once proud country. Both Thatcherite and Blairite governments have contributed to this state of affairs with their constant political meddling in the education system. There has been added to this, as well, the growing culture of mistrust of the professional expertise and competence of teachers together with a horror of any intellectual elites.

If we are honest, we must say that this used to be a Christian nation but it is so no longer. We live in post-modern, post Christian Britain, a land where neo-paganism finds a ready constituency and is as much at home here as Islam or even the new 'Scientism' (where atheistic science and material things can be the only criteria for viewing the mystery of life). The tragedy is, of course, that there are many people around us who rebel against all this and know, in their heart of hearts, that the changes outlined above have usually been foisted on them by a small number of activists in positions of power and influence.

We knew, long ago, that the national Church had largely failed, through a lack of theological and pastoral nerve, to stand up against any of these changes. It was, after all, for many of us, the very thing that brought us to the realization that the true Church of the Living God, the Church of the New Testament, was to be found elsewhere. As Orthodox Christians and knowing, as we do, that we have 'found the true faith and have received the heavenly Spirit', there can be no other work for us than the restoration of a once Christian nation. The great commission at the end of St. Matthew's gospel commands us to set about the evangelization of all nations. It was that command that brought Welsh and Irish saints to Cornwall; that brought St. Augustine to Canterbury; that sent St. Boniface to Frisia. Lack of space constrains us from going further but the nation that once sent missionaries all over the globe, now stands in need of Christ itself. For us there is no argument; it is only the Orthodox faith that will do and it is only through the Church to which our Celtic and Anglo-Saxon ancestors once belonged, that we can advance by God's grace, the re-hallowing of our land.

Whether our neighbours or friends; whether the vast majority of our countrymen who are, for the most part, indifferent to or ignorant of Christ; whether those of other faiths who have made their home here: they all stand in need of Christ. The alternative, I fear in the end, especially in the case of Islam - a political system as much as a religion (and which, by its very nature, must seek to dominate,) has to be the dreaded clash of cultures.

Next year sees the tenth anniversary of the Deanery yet, in one sense, we have but made a beginning of the great work. On the other hand, it was clear to me this summer at the Swanwick Conference where the future of Orthodox Christianity lay in this land and it did not seem to be with the immigrant Orthodox communities. At times, some of them can appear inward looking. This was evident by many of the questions raised at the conference that were peculiarly irrelevant to us members of the Antiochian Deanery. There are over a quarter of a million Greeks in this country. No one wishes to disparage their language or culture but they are already losing their young people from the Church. Those young people, brought up in modern Britain cannot connect their daily lives with a Liturgy in, what is to them, a foreign language. Many Christian peoples 'living abroad' like to seek out the services of their national chaplancies; one growth area for the Church of England is with the ex-pat community in France! But the time for that amongst the Orthodox here must, surely, be at an end. Of course, the ethnic Greek Archdiocese is welcome to stick with the old mindset, caring for the souls of its own constituency but that cannot be the vision for the Antiochian Deanery; the aim of our foundation is far broader.

What the picture will be for religion in Britain a hundred years from now is anybody's guess but, whatever happens, this is not something we just ignore with comforting thoughts of leaving it to God's providence because He has left the work to us! And we do start with ourselves: 'Save yourself,' said St. Seraphim, 'And a thousand others will be saved around you.' This, though, is no mere call to revival; they had one of those exactly one hundred years ago in Welsh Protestantism - where is it now? We are

talking of reclaiming for Christ a whole culture, one that is slowly going through the crisis of losing its own identity whilst drowning in a sea of Americanism commercialism, European Unionism and multiculturalism.

'None so cold as a Christian who doesn't care for the salvation of others,' said St. John Chrysostom. That mystery of faith which we shall again celebrate Sunday by Sunday, is not just a personal struggle to enter the kingdom of heaven. We belong to The Church, the body of Orthodox believers; a corporate and spiritual network. Salvation is social as well as individual and we do this with and for others.

A Word from the Fathers

On the Holy Cross



How precious is the gift of the Cross!
See, how beautiful it is to behold!
It shows no sign of evil mixed with good, like the tree of old in Eden;
it is all beautiful and comely to see and to taste.

For it is a tree which brings forth life, not death.
It is the source of light, not darkness. It offers you a home in Eden. It does not cast you out.
It is the tree which Christ mounted as a king his chariot, and so destroyed the devil,
the lord of death, and rescued the human race from slavery to the tyrant.

It is the tree on which the Lord, like a great warrior with his hands and feet and his divine side pierced
in battle, healed the wounds of our sins, healed our nature that had been wounded by the evil serpent.

Of old we were poisoned by a tree; now we have found immortality through a tree.
Of old we were led astray by a tree; now we have repelled the treacherous snake by means of a tree.
Indeed an unheard of exchange! We are given life instead of death, incorruptibility instead of
corruption, glory instead of dishonour.

How right Paul is to exclaim:

'Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been
crucified to me, and I to the world!'

For that supreme wisdom, which flowered on the cross, proved that the proud boasting of worldly
wisdom was folly.

The beauty of all the good gifts which grew on the cross cut out the shoots of evil.

St Theodore the Studite (759-826)

The Origins of Orthodox Church Music

The origins of the earliest Christian chant were threefold:- Ancient Jewish Synagogue music. This did not last but the influence was inevitable as the believers on the Day of Pentecost were Jews from the Diaspora – the different countries listed in ACTS 2. Secondly, the Greek influence was very pronounced. Greek was the lingua franca of the ancient Roman world and the Hellenic influence was strong in all cultural areas as well as in music. Thirdly, Syrian influence on the Byzantine tradition was also important although it did not feature in the formation of the Western musical tradition.

It was St. Ambrose of Milan who brought this early Christian music to his diocese and the Western Church and it is of interest to note how ‘oriental’ and Byzantine the original Ambrosian chant actual sounds, even down to the use of the *Ison*. Later, with the musical reforms sponsored by Pope St. Gregory the Great, (7th Cent.) much of this early Christian heritage was expunged from Milan in favour of the newly ‘sanitized’ Gregorian plainchant. Clearly though, Latin Church music was the product both of the synagogue (originally) but mainly, of the Greek tradition. Again, it is noteworthy that the music found in the earliest Byzantine manuscripts (12th Cent.) contain the eight tones which are far closer to the ‘sound’ of Latin Plainsong than what we might now think of as Byzantine music – or, perhaps we should really say that Latin music is closer to the Byzantine, as the latter was the originator.

As well as finding its origins in the ancient synagogue, in Greek and in Syrian music, the principal ‘filters’ of chant in the Eastern Church were the cities of Byzantium and Jerusalem. The great monasteries in particular helped in the development and codification of the liturgy that we now serve. Of particular importance here is John of Damascus (an Antiochian saint of the 8th Cent.) who was very much connected with the development of the Oktoechos. It used to be thought that these eight tones had developed amongst the pre-Christian Greeks but it has been conclusively shown that they are in fact a purely Christian creation and can justly claim to be the distillation of a pure Orthodox Christian music that can trace its very beginnings to the Upper Room at the close of the Mystical Supper (St. Mark 14:26).

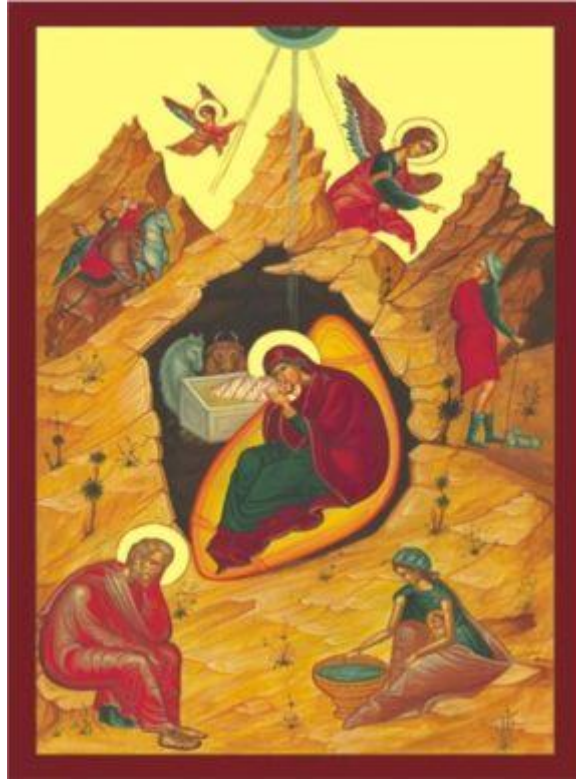
The 12th Century manuscripts referred to above come in fact from Mount Sinai and are dated to the year 1177. It clearly represents the music that was carried into Russia when the Orthodox faith was brought there under the sponsorship of St. Vladimir. (10th cent.) This form of chant, influenced in part by Russian folk music, became the famous Znameny chant. Here, if anywhere, is to be found the true Orthodox music of Russia; it was only in the 17th Century that the familiar westernization of Russian religious music began. Ironically, it was the schismatic Old Believers who preserved much of the original Russian musical tradition and kept it alive in the forests of Northern Russia.

Of course, it is natural for Westerners, becoming Orthodox, to be drawn to the popular westernised Russian music. It must be said, that it serves its purpose well. However, for those who wish to share an even closer link with the fountainhead of the original and authentic tradition, there needs to be a return to a pure and truly Orthodox music - This has to be Byzantine chant.

Note: The Typical Psalms used at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, are a feature of the Russian Liturgy. Undoubtedly, they are original, as used in the Great Church in Constantinople; St. Nicholas Cabasilas bears witness to this in his commentary on the Liturgy. However, Modern Greek practice – *that ought to be followed in the Antiochian Patriarchate* - now uses the Antiphons with their verses, rather than the Typical Psalms and the Beatitudes.

Fr. Chrysostom MacDonnell

2005 Christmas message from Metropolitan Gabriel



"Today the Unapproachable in Essence is born, and He is wrapped in swaddling clothes. He who has laid the foundations of the heavens is lying in a crib."

Hymn from Matins of the Feast of the Nativity

The voice of God, the only Son, born before the centuries, takes flesh and becomes man. He comes to live among us, to give sight to the blind, to straighten the crippled, to refine the soul and bodies that are debilitated by the disease of sin - to give back to man access to the One who can make us perfect.

It was possible for He Himself to come into the world in all the glory, majesty and power of God. He preferred to be born in a crib, and live with human beings, the Humble One amongst us lowly ones, working and teaching in order to bring liberty, and to offer a life lived in love.

I am speaking here to the faithful, beloved in our Church, and to all believers. I invite you to open your doors and to leave them wide open in order to welcome the Divine Child. If you do, you will benefit from the blessings and grace which the heavenly Father has sent us by His Son, the Mediator for more than 2000 years.

He passes on to us a message of peace and liberty. He has come in order to teach us reverence for the truth, to encourage brotherly relations between individuals and families. He has come to defend the rights of the human person against all oppression, tyranny and enslavement.

Let Him come into your home, open your heart to Him! He will cleanse away all the rancour, which is the source of all evil; it goads people into crime and a spirit of revenge. The Divine Child asks of us that we free ourselves from every kind of rancour and hatred, that we learn to respect others, defend their rights and establish loving relationships with people.

Everywhere in the world around us we only see entrenched conflicts. Violence only makes the days longer for people - and increases the number of those victimised. Children are being killed and their bodies left strewn along the roadway. The wounded, displaced persons, orphans, widows and old people

are without shelter, exposed to the rigours of the elements. They can be counted in thousands. Churches and other religious places are destroyed or abandoned. From all this it would seem the world has stopped its ears from hearing the voice of God. It does not hear the God who called to Cain saying, "where is your brother, Abel? What have you done? Listen to the cry of your brother's blood crying out to Me from the earth" (Genesis 4:9-10). And what does the world do? What is it waiting for before it puts an end to these massacres?

Christmas is a good time for examining our hearts in the light of Christ. Let us hold ourselves in a spirit of humility and compunction before the Child of Bethlehem. Pray for peace to come back to the earth, and for harmony to prevail between peoples. Let us ask the All-Holy New Born to cause us to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of justice and peace, of forgiveness, tolerance, concord and love between human beings and between peoples and nations.

Beloved, Christ is our peace on the earth. Allow Him to send his light to shine upon the darkneses of our heart. It will give our soul - His splendour and our face - his smile. Let us glorify God and shout out: "glory to God in the highest, heaven and peace on earth to all men whom He loves."