

The Waves Keep Coming In The Evangelical, Charismatic, Orthodox Axis

An address given by Very Revd Michael Harper on 27th November in Wesley House, Cambridge on the occasion of the Centenary of the coming of the Pentecostal Movement to the United Kingdom.

One hundred years ago last September the Pentecostal Movement arrived on the shores of this country. An Anglican Priest called the Reverend Alexander Boddy, was God's instrument in 1907 to bring this Movement to his homeland. He was the Vicar of a rather obscure working class parish – All Saints, Monkwearmouth, in Sunderland. His Bishop at the time was Bishop Handley Moule, who had been the first Principal of Ridley Hall in Cambridge.

We shall be looking in this talk at the waves which have already lapped the shores of this land – the Wesleyan revival of the 18th century, and the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements of the 20th. We shall note their roots as well as their fruits. Through these waves we have witnessed a new understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification and in the empowering of God's people through the experience of Pentecost. Now we need to observe some of the common roots of all this - in particular Pentecostal, Anglican, Methodist and Orthodox– and the fruit that has come and is coming from that sharing process. In the 21st century it is becoming clearer than ever that we do have important common roots, even if we sometimes are not fully aware of them. We can share in the fruits that come from this discovery, and experience what I shall argue are the new waves springing from these common roots.

In looking back we should banish from our minds any thoughts of the guilt of not being relevant, or of being old fashioned. Professor Henry Chadwick once wrote, “there is nothing sadder than someone who has lost his memory; and the Church which loses its memory is in the same state of senility.” So we shall attach no shame in taking a journey through time from the Early Church to today, more recently taking in such diverse places as Aldersgate Street, London, Azusa Street, Los Angeles, All Saints', Monkwearmouth in Sunderland and Oral Roberts

University in Oklahoma City. So let us start the journey at Aldersgate Street, and the date is May 24th 1738.

1 Wesley's roots in the Early Church

On that day John Wesley wrote in his Journal: "I think it was five in the morning that I opened my testament on those words 'there are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature.' 2 Peter 1:4. Just as I went out I opened it again on those words 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.'" The verse from 2 Peter, Wesley wrote in Greek, which was his normal way of emphasising a verse.

He then describes his visit to Evensong in St Paul's Cathedral. And then he wrote the famous words, "in the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther's preface to the Romans. About a quarter before nine while he was describing the change that God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation. And an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even my sins, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Kenneth Carveley writing about these words in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice* says "its use of the text from 2 Peter coincidentally unites both eastern deification (*theosis*) theology with Pietist religion of the heart."¹

Much has been and is being written about the links between the Early Church, particularly in the ante-Nicene period, and John Wesley. Two foremost advocates of this have been Albert Outler² in the United States and the English theologian H A Hodges³, who began life as a Methodist

¹ In chapter 12, *The Visitation of the Word* p 213

² Professor Albert C Outler pioneered the re-discovery of the roots of early Methodism in the Early Church in the 70s and 80s.

³ H A Hodges (1905-1976) was Professor of Philosophy at Reading University. According to Donald Allchin, "he became convinced that the Catholicism of the Greek East, Eastern Orthodoxy, presented a fuller and more balanced picture of the Christian faith. For him Eastern Orthodoxy became normative." Herbert Hodges explains this in a monograph *Anglicanism and Orthodoxy* SCM 1955

before joining the Church of England, although he felt his real home was in Orthodoxy.

But let us be careful for some of this linking can be exaggerated. We should not dress John Wesley up entirely in Byzantine clothing. Far from it. He read widely and from a great variety of sources – Anglican, Catholic as well as the Greek Fathers. He had plenty of time to read and write because of his widespread travels. And his views were not always consistent with those of the Early Church. For example, as early as 1740 he was forming an opinion that the offices of Bishop and Presbyter were one and the same. Nevertheless the links with the Eastern Fathers in certain vital areas are there for all to see.

Another interesting link can be made with two outstanding Anglican divines of an earlier period – Richard Hooker and Bishop Lancelot Andrewes. Donald Allchin reminds us of this in his article *The Epworth-Canterbury-Constantinople Axis*. Hooker writes in Volume 1 of *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* about this “participation of the divine nature”, and Allchin comments, “for Hooker the phrase from 2 Peter sums up the whole Gospel”.⁴

The well known Orthodox writer Nicholas Lossky has written a biography of Lancelot Andrewes in which he writes, “the importance given to pneumatology in the theology of Andrewes is to be explained, in my view, by the stress which he puts on the deification of man as the supreme goal of the way of salvation. It is a question of the union of man with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit”.⁵

We can see a firm pointer in this direction when the Holy Club in Oxford at the beginning of the 18th Century restored the practice of fasting not only on Fridays but also on Wednesdays, which has always been the Eastern practice. It was first ordered as early as the *Didache* (early 2nd Century). Fasting on Wednesdays was in memory of the betrayal of the Lord, and Fridays of his death on the Cross. John Wesley lived at a time when there was a revival of the study of the early Church Fathers particularly in Oxford where he was a Fellow. For John Wesley there were two sources that predominated – the writings of St John Chrysostom and the Macarian Homilies, whose true author is unknown, and which were written probably in the 4th or early 5th century.

⁴ Page 29

⁵ *Lancelot Andrewes, Le Predicateur* (Paris 1986) page 327

It was John Wesley's father Samuel who first introduced his son to St John Chrysostom. Just before his son's ordination he urged him to read St John Chrysostom's book *On the Priesthood*. "Master it, digest it" he wrote. And again, "Master St Chrysostom". This was to be a defining moment in the ministry of Wesley. K Steve McCormick in an article *Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: an Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love* writes "what we can state as a thesis here is that Wesley's most comprehensive response to the question of the nature of the Christian life was that it was faith filled with the energy of love... a result of the discovery of the strand of theosis... borrowed from the Eastern Fathers, most notably St John Chrysostom."⁶

The Macarian Homilies were another major source for the thinking of John Wesley. One of the most quoted statements of John Wesley in his diary was the entry for July 30th 1736 "I read Macarius and sang!". One notes that this took place nearly two years before his heart warming experience. And Wesley was not alone in his appreciation of the Macarian Homilies, Johann Arndt, a Pietist, was said to know all fifty of them by heart. But it is also clear that it was not unknown for Wesley, although he quoted freely from the Homilies, to leave out passages in them which he did not agree with.

Nearly forty years after his Aldersgate Street experience, John Wesley was still solidly connected to the Early Church. On April 21st 1777 when laying the foundation stone of the New Chapel in London, Wesley said, "this is the religion of the Primitive Church, of the whole Church in the purest ages. It is clearly expressed, even in the small remains of Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Polycarp; it is seen more at large in the writings of Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyprian; and, even in the fourth century, it was found in the works of Chrysostom, Basil, Ephrem the Syrian, and Macarius. It would be easy to produce 'a cloud of witnesses,' testifying the same thing; were not this a point which no one will contest, who has the least acquaintance with Christian antiquity." (Sermon 112, *The Works of John Wesley* ed A. Outler, vol 3, p 386)

When we look at this period we see that the overwhelming emphasis was on holiness, the pursuit of Christian perfection or entire sanctification. When Conyers Middleton expressed scepticism at reports of miraculous happenings in the first three centuries, Wesley defended them

⁶ *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Vol 28 number 1 page 52

ferociously. But Wesley never encouraged their recovery or their normal use in the Church. For Wesley the purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit was to make us holy. When the gifts of the Spirit were to be restored was to him something “which it is not necessary to decide.”⁷

2 Pentecostal Roots in the Holiness Movement: Aldersgate Street to Azusa Street

We need now to trace the journey through time from Aldersgate Street to Azusa Street, some one hundred and sixty-nine years later. Donald W Dayton has done a well documented survey of these years in his book *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*.⁸ It would seem that the first shifts from the Wesleyan to the Pentecostal teaching took place during Wesley’s lifetime and can be traced to the work of John Fletcher, the Vicar of Madeley. Fletcher was Wesley’s designated successor, although in the event he pre-deceased him. For Wesley the “moment” was entire sanctification; but Fletcher started using different language – he talked about “receiving the Holy Ghost”, and Wesley objected to this, though their partnership was not affected by the disagreement. Wesley told Fletcher that he believed that all Christians received the Holy Spirit when they were justified.

Fletcher explained it by saying that he saw a difference between Christians who were baptized by the Pentecostal power of the Holy Ghost and those who were not, a view which Wesley could not accept. Technically that made Fletcher a Pentecostal but not Wesley. One other fact which Donald Dayton draws out is the fact that John Wesley very seldom ever mentions the Acts of the Apostles in his sermons or writings. But when we turn to Fletcher we find that he quotes from the Acts more than any other book in the New Testament.⁹ As is well known it was the Acts more than any other book which was to come into centre stage in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements.

Methodism, as Donald Dayton points out was to find its real destiny in America.¹⁰ In a way it was the first great Christian success in the free

⁷ See *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, Donald Dayton, pages 44-45

⁸ Scarecrow Press, 1987

⁹ Op. cit. pages 49-54

¹⁰ Op, cit. page 63

market which developed in the United States in the 19th Century. When Francis Asbury arrived in America in 1771, there were barely 1000 Methodists in the country. By the time he died in 1816 1 million people, one-eighth of the entire population were attending Methodist camp meetings, the 19th century equivalent of the mega-churches of the 20th Century. So by the mid-19th century it had become the most influential Church in the United States. The century is marked by numerous holiness movements and experiences of revival, especially in 1857-58. Oberlin perfectionism and the work of Charles Finney took centre stage for a long period; but then there began to emerge Pentecostal imagery – and the pendulum began to turn in the direction of John Fletcher. More and more the phrase “Baptism in the Spirit” was used – though still connected to the holiness motif.

Then came the American Civil War to disrupt things as the First World War was later to hinder the flow of the Pentecostal Movement. The holiness movements and revivals quietened down – but in the last twenty years of the 19th Century there was a growing turning to the theology of the Holy Spirit and the word “power” became much more commonly used. It was all to lead the way to the Pentecostal understanding of the Holy Spirit.

Let us now turn to Alexander Boddy, the Vicar in Sunderland, and his roots. He had very unusual links with both Wesley and the Orthodox Church. He was actually distantly related to Wesley. His mother was Jane Vazeille Stocks, who was descended from Mary Vazeille, whose second husband was John Wesley. Her first husband was Antony Vazeille, a French Huguenot, and they had three sons and a daughter. The Boddys gave the name Vazeille to their son James and their two daughters, Mary and Jane.¹¹ But more important were the roots that he had in the Holiness Movement, particularly in the Keswick Convention, which he attended for the first time in 1876, the year after it was founded.

His contact with the Orthodox Church was also unusual, for at that time there were very few Orthodox Churches in western Europe. But Alexander Boddy was a keen traveller and twice visited Russia. According to Peter Lavin in his study of Alexander Boddy “he was attracted by aspects of Orthodoxy such as the devoted humility of its

¹¹Gavin Wakefield *Alexander Boddy, Pentecostal Anglican Pioneer*, Paternoster 2007 - page 55f

believers, its intense spirituality and the glowing beauty of its icons”.¹² He then describes his second visit in 1886, “he was to return to Holy Mother Russia escaping from the incredibly soulless western secularism to witness how in Orthodoxy ‘God came down to earth’”.

This time he was to visit the great Solovetsk Monastery in the far north of Russia on the shores of the Arctic. One thing in particular impressed him – a depiction, painted in the dome of the great Cathedral, of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost on the whole church. He wrote about it “our traditional idea of the power from on high only falling on the Twelve Apostles does not seem to agree with Acts 1:14-15 and 2:6”. So did this experience in Russia set his mind thinking about a personal Pentecost for all?¹³

In passing it is interesting that one of the strongest concentrations of Gulags in Stalinist Russia was around this Monastery, and Stalin established his programme to produce the atomic and nuclear bombs in Sarov, which still to this day is a forbidden city. One of the greatest saints of the Russian Orthodox Church is St Seraphim of Sarov, of all places.

Alexander Boddy witnessed the life and practices of the Orthodox Church in a variety of areas – one of which was Baptism. It is an Orthodox tradition to give a cross to a newly baptised child and hang it around their neck. Alexander Boddy was given one of these crosses when he was in Russia and hung it around the neck of his eldest daughter Mary when he baptised her in 1892. There is also an interesting reference to a towel used in the baptism, which makes one wonder if he had baptised her unclothed as is the Orthodox practice. He certainly baptised her by immersion – not triple in the Orthodox way, but seven-fold!

Alexander Boddy’s second daughter Jane recalls that her father brought many icons back from Russia and displayed them prominently in their hall for all to see; he did the same when they moved later into their next parish. Also, if you look at the family photo reproduced in Peter Lavin’s

¹²*Alexander Boddy Pastor and Prophet* page 10

¹³Gavin Wakefield pages 40-44 His visit to Solovetsk is also mentioned by Metropolitan Kallistos in his paper *Personal Experience of the Holy Spirit according to the Greek Fathers*.

book, you will notice that Mrs. Boddy is wearing a Russian Orthodox cross around her neck.

We need to see, as a background to all of this, the important role played by the Christians of the United States. Although Methodism was founded in Britain, it developed as we have already noted much more strongly in the United States, becoming one of the largest and most influential Churches in the land. The Holiness Movement was enormously strong in the 19th century in America – spawning many revivals and new denominations. The Pentecostal Movement began in the United States in Topeka, Kansas or Azusa Street, California, whichever view you take, and the Charismatic Movement first hit the headlines in Van Nuys, California, only a few miles north of Azusa Street. The Catholic Charismatic Movement did not start in Rome, although it did get there fairly quickly. Its birth was in Pittsburgh in 1967.

The story of the beginnings of the Pentecostal Movement, which was to become the largest Christian movement of the 20th Century, could hardly have been less promising. The principal of the Topeka Bible College in Kansas City was a hot racist called Charles Parham. He was both a British Israelite and a member of the Klu Klux Klan. He believed strongly in white supremacy. On the eve of the new century, on December 31st 1900, he went away and told the students to investigate from the Bible what was the initial evidence of the so called Baptism in the Holy Spirit. When he got back that evening they had only one answer, speaking in tongues. That night to usher in the new century they prayed for this experience, and the first person to speak in tongues was a woman called Agnes Ozman.

Charles Parham was soon in trouble. His Bible School was rather unfairly called “the Tower of Babel”, so he moved south to Houston, Texas, where he opened a new Bible School. His students were racially segregated. The blacks could not sit with the whites, so occupied seating in the corridor outside. One of the black students was a one-eyed man called William J. Seymour. He did not last long with Charles Parham, but moved West in a segregated train in January 1906 to California, where he opened a new Church in the downtown area of Los Angeles, in a stable in Azusa Street. It was there later that year that the Pentecostal Movement sprang to life, not the first time that a great movement has begun in a stable.

The link between all this and Sunderland was a person called T.B. Barrett. He was born in Cornwall, and his father was a mining engineer,

who moved to Norway to work there on a mining project. They were Methodists. T.B. Barrett became a Methodist Minister in Oslo, and when he heard about Azusa Street he decided to travel there to find out, and also, of course, to raise money for his Church. But he never got further than New York. It was there that he ran into the flow of people coming from Azusa Street who were determined to share the Good News with as many people as possible. He was prayed for and came back to Oslo with the experience of the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues, but not very much money.

He soon got cracking and the Pentecostal Movement broke out in his Methodist Church. The news leaked out, and one of those who heard about it was the Revd Alexander Boddy in England. He booked his passage to Oslo and while there invited T.B. Barrett to come across the North Sea to Sunderland. He accepted the invitation and arrived in Sunderland on August 31st 1907. The next day was a Sunday, and in the evening according to the local press, the women of Sunderland began to speak Chinese in the Church.

This unusual start in the United States soon spread around the world, and there are today around 500 million Pentecostals, with the strongest concentrations in the Third World. In Guatemala, for example, the Pentecostals have built probably the largest building in Latin America. It is called Mega Frater (Big Brother) and seats 12,000 people. It has a huge baptism pool and a heliport. Another Pentecostal Church in Lagos, Nigeria, has been known to bring out 2 million people onto the streets. It is interesting that there are larger concentrations of Pentecostals in Eastern than Western Europe, one of the largest being in the Ukraine.

The Economist magazine has recently produced an 18 page special report on faith and politics (November 3-9 2007), in which it has especially featured the Pentecostals. It reports on the most remarkable of all Pentecostal Churches, the Yoido Full Gospel Church, in Seoul, Korea. It was founded in 1956 in a battered \$50 tent borrowed from an American army unit. Now they have seven services on Sunday with around 32,000 people at each. Our Orthodox Church in London has one Deacon. In this Church in South Korea they have 34,000! They also have 68,000 Deaconesses.

And Pentecostalism in the second half of the 20th Century spread to the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches. One of the fruits in this country has been the Alpha course, pioneered by Holy Trinity Church,

Brompton, and reputedly attended by over 2 million people in this country alone. And no doubt there are further waves to come.

3 Back again to the Early Church

The Americans are also the front runners in another wave which is now lapping our shores, which has roots in the Early Church. It was in the autumn of 1969 that I received my first invitation to teach at the Pentecostal Oral Roberts University in Oklahoma City. I did not know Oral Roberts himself at that time, although I was to meet him a year or so later after he had converted to the Methodist Church, and I had a lot to do with him for several years. But on this occasion my host was the University Chaplain, Revd Bob Stamps, who was a Methodist.

While there I was invited to attend a service called “Vespers”. I was staggered with what I saw and heard. Some of the students were dressed in white gowns and incense was being sprinkled liberally over all and sundry. What on earth was this? My visit had coincided with the beginning of an Eastern Orthodox revival on the Campus, which was to continue for the next decade or so.

During my stay Bob Stamps invited me over to a piano and told me he wanted to share with me a new song he had just written:

Oh welcome all ye noble saints of old
Now before your very eyes unfold
Wonders all so long ago foretold
God and man at table are sat down.

Elders, martyrs, all are falling down
Prophets, Patriarchs are gathering round
Angels longed to see now man has found
God and man at table are sat down.

Here He gives himself to us as bread
Born to die we eat and live instead
Here as wine we drink the blood He shed
God and man at table are sat down.¹⁴

¹⁴ Published in *Sound of Living Waters* edited by Jeanne Harper and Betty Pulkingham, Hodder and Stoughton 1974

I brought the song back to England and it became popular in this country. Does one not see the Orthodox nuances? When I shared the words with an Orthodox Priest – we looked at one another. I said, “am I thinking what you are thinking?”. “Yes” he replied – “the Rublev icon of the Trinity”.

An important development in the last thirty years or so has been the drawing together of some Evangelicals and Pentecostals with some of the Orthodox. There is a practical reason why this is now much easier. Orthodoxy has spread during the 20th century through an increasing tide of migration to the West. In 1907 there were only a few Greek Churches in this country, mostly in sea ports and linked with the shipping business, and there were no Russian, Serbian, Romanian or Antiochian. But now in the United Kingdom nearly every city and sizeable town has at least one and often more than one Orthodox place of worship. In the United States the spread has been at times spectacular, although it needs to be remembered that the first incursions of Orthodoxy in North America came through the spread of the Moscow Patriarchate into Alaska when it was part of Russia, and down the western seaboard as far as Santa Barbara, California. In some significant cases this development has led to receptions into the Orthodox Church. One can mention particularly the well known Lutheran theologian Jaroslav Pelikan, and the striking instance of the reception of over 2000 Evangelicals into the Antiochian Orthodox Church in the United States in 1987. It was largely their study of early Church History which led them in this direction.

A book published in the United States called *Coming Home*¹⁵ is a collection of testimonies of some eighteen converts to Orthodoxy, coming from a variety of backgrounds – Oral Roberts University, Asbury Seminary, Westminster Seminary, Campus Crusade for Christ and so on. One of them, now an Orthodox Priest, Father Antony Hughes, was a student at ORU. At his very first class the students were amazed when the professor began the class with the sign of the cross, invocations to the Holy Trinity, and even the Lord’s Prayer had a strange ending. In his closing prayer he mentioned the Theotokos, and read from one of the chosen text books *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, actually from the life of St Pelagia the Harlot!¹⁶

¹⁵ Edited by Peter Gillquist Conciliar Press 1992

¹⁶ Op. cit. pages 15-21

The interest in the Evangelical world is being nurtured in the United States through a number of leaders. One of them is Father Peter Gillquist, who was a prominent leader in the Campus Crusade for Christ Movement, and who in 1987 led 2000 Evangelicals to embrace Orthodoxy.¹⁷ Another is Professor Bradley Nassif, an Antiochian Orthodox layman, who is a Theological Professor in Chicago, and who was deeply influenced by Evangelicals when he was studying at University. He has written a number of books and is developing an open dialogue with Evangelicals. Some of this has been published in the book *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*.¹⁸ In this country the Evangelical Alliance has organised dialogue between the Orthodox and Evangelicals and the result of this has been published in the book *Evangelicalism and the Orthodox Church*.¹⁹ In Cyprus there has been a drawing together and the story about this has been recalled in a book *Turning Over a New Leaf: Protestant Missions and the Orthodox Churches of the Middle East*.²⁰ The WCC has also organised Orthodox-Evangelical Consultations in Egypt and Germany.²¹

But it is in the Pentecostal world that such dialogue is progressing at an even stronger pace. This has been well summarised by Dr Edmund Rybarczyk in a paper entitled *Mysticism Old and New; similarities in Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism*.²² It was read at a Charismatic Conference in Prague in 1997, where I was the Chairman. Dr Rybarczyk is a Pentecostal and an Adjunct Professor of Religion in California. He shows clearly the points of convergence which cover the whole area of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He summarises this when he writes “for

¹⁷ The story of their Pilgrimage has been told by Peter Gillquist in his book *Becoming Orthodox, a Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith*.

¹⁸ Zondervan 2004

¹⁹ Acute 2001

²⁰ Interserve and Middle East Media second edition 1992

²¹ Two Orthodox-Evangelical Consultations have taken place, the first with the theme “The Bible, Early Confessions and Tradition” in Stuttgart in 1993, the second with the theme “Proclaiming Christ” in Alexandria in 1995. A book about them is about to be published by the WCC.

²² ICCOWE 2000

the sake of revealing Christ to the world it is my conviction that these two traditions... have a great deal they must learn from one another”.²³

We see the same convergence in the writings of Dr Simon Chan, a Professor at Trinity Theological Seminary in Singapore and a member of the Assemblies of God. In the book *The Azusa Street Revival and its Legacy*²⁴ he mentions three emerging trends in global Pentecostalism. The first he describes as the “emergence of sacramental theology”. The second that of authority and continuity. On this he writes, “any legitimate apostolic ministry will have to be established on the basis of *historical continuity* with the Apostles, and this means accepting the apostolic succession of ‘traditional Christianity’”.²⁵

As far as the third trend is concerned he writes, “an apostolic church ... with a sacramental theology is sustained by a living Liturgy”. This he has developed more fully in his book published by Inter-Varsity *Liturgical Theology, the Church as worshipping Community*. In this book he writes, “Tradition is the means by which the Church understands its true identity. We can make sense of what the church is now only because it exists in *historical continuity* with the Church then. To repudiate that historical link is to put our own identification with the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” church into serious doubt.” (p31) If one links up sacramental theology, apostolic succession and a living Liturgy you really are heading in the direction of the Orthodox Church!

This trend can be observed increasingly in Evangelical writing. A clue is the use of “naughty” words which used to be on the forbidden list – Tradition, Apostolic Succession, Sacraments, the Catechumenate, and Liturgy. The Baptist Evangelical D.H. Williams has written a book called *Evangelicals and Tradition*, with the sub-title “the formative influences of the Early Church”. (Paternoster 2005). It is part of a series under the intriguing title “Deep Church” which is about “retrieving from the Church’s past as we look to the Church’s future.”

4 The honouring of the Holy Spirit

²³ Op. cit. page 24

²⁴ Pathway Press 2006 pages 223f

²⁵ Op. cit. page 224

Most will agree that the Church which through the centuries has most fully honoured the Holy Spirit, and brought Him most fully into its worship, life and ministry has been the Orthodox. Let us look briefly at five areas where this is clear:

First, there has been the strong emphasis in the whole life of the Church on the Trinity, which sees the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as co-equal. The Church has also condemned the insertion by the Western Church of the *filioque* clause in the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, which weakens the co-equality of the Persons of the Trinity.

Secondly, the Orthodox Church has always emphasised the Incarnation and thus the work of the Holy Spirit in the conception of Christ in the womb of the Theotokos, the God-bearer.

Thirdly, the Orthodox Church has been the only Church to continue the practice of Christian Baptism as the three-fold immersion of the candidate in water, followed immediately by Chrismation symbolising the reception of the Holy Spirit and His Sealing - and followed then by the candidate receiving their first communion. Again the Holy Spirit is active in the whole baptismal process.

Fourthly, in the Orthodox Eucharist (of St John Chrysostom), which is seen by the Orthodox as the heart of the Church, the service is interspersed with many references to the Holy Spirit. It begins, for example, with a prayer to the Holy Spirit which is unique in liturgical practices:

O heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things, the Treasury of good things and Giver of life: come, and abide in us, and cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O good One.

In the Russian tradition the following words are spoken by the Priest just before the *Epiclesis*: “O Lord, who at the third hour didst send down upon thine apostles thy Holy Spirit: take not the same from us, O good One, but renew him in us who pray unto Thee.”

Then follows the important *epiclesis* prayer which the Priest says, “send down thy Holy Spirit *upon us* and upon these gifts spread forth.” Notice it is a prayer for the Holy Spirit to come upon the people as well as the bread and the wine. Earlier in the service, if there is more than one Priest at the service, a dialogue takes place:

Pray for me, brother(s) and concelebrant(s)
 May the Holy Spirit descend upon thee and the power of the
 Most High overshadow thee
 May the same Spirit serve with us all the days of our life.

In another place the Priest prays that “the power of the Holy Spirit” will enable him.

Fifthly, there are the Feasts of Theophany and the Transfiguration of Christ, both of which have a very prominent place in the Orthodox Church. Theophany is the name given to what in the West is called Epiphany. In the West the liturgical focus is on the visit of the Magi to Christ after his birth in Bethlehem. But in the East the focus is on the Baptism of Christ in the river Jordan, which is an event which has never been given the same emphasis in the West. The importance of Christ’s Baptism is the manifestation of the Trinity – the voice of the Father *and* the coming of the Holy Spirit as a dove on Christ. In the Early Church this was seen as the pattern for Christian Baptisms, at least until the heresy of Adoptionism caused the emphasis to shift.

As far as the Feast of the Transfiguration is concerned – the Orthodox Church has given it great prominence from the 4th century, whereas in the West it appeared first in the 9th century and only fully in the 15th. The late Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, once wrote, “Orthodoxy has a much greater grasp than we in the West of the significance and meaning of the Transfiguration”. The Orthodox see again in this incident the Trinity – the voice of the Father and the cloud that overshadowed them signifying the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps this is the right place to leave our study – with Christ on mount Tabor. This is where we all can share. This is where our journey can take in Aldersgate Street and Azusa Street. It is a pity that the Wesleys and so many others have tended to limit the sources on this subject mostly to the ante-Nicene period. The Emperor Constantine is seen as a cut off point. So the Early Methodists did not seem to know the writings of the most charismatic of all the Church Fathers – St Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022)²⁶ and later the immensely important contribution of St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359).

²⁶Metropolitan Kallistos in his lecture *Personal Experience of the Holy Spirit according to the Greek Fathers* focuses on the writings of St Symeon.

St Gregory argued that Christians can and do experience the divine light. He sought to answer the question – how can humans know God and the God who is by nature unknowable? He answered this by teaching that we know the *energies* of God, but not his *essence*. Metropolitan Kallistos writes, “God is Light, and, therefore, the experience of God’s energies takes the form of Light. The vision... is not a vision of some created radiance, but of the Light of the Godhead itself – the same light of the Godhead which surrounded Christ on Mount Tabor.”²⁷

Thus the Orthodox see the Transfiguration not only as an experience that Christ received – but as something we can experience ourselves. One immediately thinks of the story of St Seraphim of Sarov and his encounter with Nicholas Motovilov. St Seraphim taught that the true aim of the Christian life was the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God, and this was the subject of their discussion in the forest. They were both to be transfigured:

Then Father Seraphim took me very firmly by the shoulders and said “my son, we are both at this moment in the Spirit of God.

Why don’t you look at me?”

“I cannot look, Father” I replied – “because your eyes are flashing like lightning – your face has become brighter than the sun, and it hurts my eyes to look at you.”

“Don’t be afraid” he said, “at this very moment you yourself have become as bright as I am. You yourself are now in the fullness of the Spirit of God; otherwise you will not be able to see me as you do.”

Then – bending his head toward me, he whispered softly in my ear: “thank the Lord God for his infinite goodness toward us... But why, my son, do you not look me in the eyes? Just look and do not be afraid; the Lord is with us.”²⁸

Motovilov then described a blinding light that spread for several yards lighting up not only St Seraphim, but the whole snow covered landscape. The reported conversation ends with these words from St Seraphim,

²⁷ Metropolitan Kallistos *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin pages 68-69

²⁸ Op. cit. pages 119-120 The conversation in the forest is recalled in Fedotov’s *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality* pages 273-5

which are deeply charismatic in their essence, “when the Spirit of God comes down on a man and overshadows him with the fullness of his presence, then that man’s soul overflows with unspeakable joy, for the Holy Spirit fills with joy whatever He touches...”. Metropolitan Kallistos describes this experience as “the brightness which is nothing less than the uncreated energies of God – the light which spreads round them is identical with the divine light which shone around our Lord at his Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.”

In the Orthodox Church there are numerous examples of this in the experience of the dead bodies of saints. For example the death of St Sergius of Radonezh “the saint’s face gleamed like snow, not as the face of a dead man, but with a living radiance, or as the face of an angel....”

We also see this in the days of the Wesleys. Charles Wesley wrote this verse about the death of Mrs Mary Horton:

The grace that saved our happy friend,
Which made her faithful to the end,
 And decked her head with rays,
We shall for us sufficient prove,
And strive, in humble fear and love,
 To perfect holiness.

One of Charles Wesley’s most famous hymns was based on the Transfiguration::

Christ whose glory fills the skies
 Christ the true the only Light
Sun of righteousness arise
 Triumph over all the shades of night;
Dayspring from on high, be near;
Day-star in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn
 Unaccompanied by Thee
Joyless is the day’s return,
 Till Thy mercy’s beams I see,
Till Thou inward light impart,
Glad my eyes and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine;
 Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;

Fill me, Radiancy divine;
 Scatter all my unbelief;
 More and more Thyself display,
 Shining to the perfect day.

So let me summarise and look in general at the map of where our journey has taken us. All our journey is about the restoration of elements of the revelation of Christ to the world through His Body, the Church. We have seen how, through God becoming Man and through the action of the Holy Spirit, we can become holy people – as we become partakers of the divine nature. We have also seen that Pentecost was essentially the empowering of the people of God that they could not only be like Christ in his nature, but do the works that He did. Both are made possible by the moving of what is in the head to the heart, which is at the centre of the life and practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church. As the 4th century Desert Father Evagrius has put it, “one who prays truly will be a theologian, and one who is a theologian will pray truly”. This is often quoted today as putting into words the patristic ideal of how theology relates to the spiritual life.

But today the focus of the new wave is shifting to the nature of the Church itself, her sacraments, liturgy and authority. To understand this we need yet again to return to the Early Church – the golden age of Christianity.

But beware! In the history we have covered we have seen the new waves of the Spirit rejected by those who have experienced the old ones. Many leaders of the Holiness Movements rejected and condemned the Pentecostal Movement and its leaders. The Revd Alexander Boddy, when he shared at Keswick what had been happening in Sunderland, found very little interest and support. The Charismatic Movement was not received with open arms by many Pentecostals, especially when it surfaced in the Roman Catholic Church. Let us weigh all things carefully, let us test the spirits, but let us then -welcome the new waves as they come in, and bathe ourselves in them.

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