

The Shepherd

An Orthodox Christian Pastoral Magazine

VOLUME XXI NUMBER 3 NOVEMBER 2000

FROM THE FATHERS

"IF YOU LOVE CHASTITY, do not love wandering about. The occurrences that befall you by reason of your wandering do not allow you vigilantly to retain chastity in your soul. No man who loves wandering possesses chastity. And do not believe that anyone who is entangled with men of this world is humble. Every man who loves God loves a quiet life. It is impossible for a man who wanders about to preserve the truth untainted in his soul."

Venerable Isaac the Syrian, seventh century

"LISTEN: Whosoever shall confess in Me, I shall also confess in him before God' [see *Luke 12:8*; N.B. the original text has "confess in Me," although in most translations into English the preposition is omitted]. He means, 'Whosoever shall confess while in My strength and while I work in synergy with him, I shall also confess in him, that is, in him who works in synergy with Me. First of all we need God, for without Him we can do nothing. But at the same time, [for there to be this salvific collaboration,] God needs us. For if God does not find us working worthy deeds, He cannot work with us; if He did so [that is, arbitrarily choosing some and not others,] He would be a *respector of persons* (Acts 10:34). Therefore, we confess in Him, that is, in Him Who works with us, and He confesses in us, that is, in us who work with Him. If we do not give Him cause to do so, He will not confess on our behalf. But he who denies, does not deny with God's help, and therefore the Lord did not say, 'He that denieth in Me,' but simply He *that denieth Me*. Also, it may be that because every saint dwells in Christ, and Christ in him, this is why the Lord said *Whosoever shall confess in Me*, meaning, 'Whosoever shall confess, dwelling in Me, I also shall confess, dwelling in him.'"

Blessed Theophylact of Ochrid, eleventh century

SAINT ARSENIUS OF CAPPADOCIA

IT CAME as rather a shock to find on reading the life of a saint, that I was already a schoolgirl at the time of his death, and that he had spent almost his entire life in obscurity in a village in central Turkey close to Urgup, whose beautifully frescoed chapels cut into limestone crags I had not so long ago visited as a curious tourist. With a feeling of shame I continued to read. My love for this selfless monk increased, and with it my love for God, Who had given him such power. He remained almost totally unknown except to his little flock, but God knew and loved him, and gave proof to the world in His own good time. Once in Jerusalem, which he visited every ten years, when concelebrating at a Great Feast with the Patriarch and about forty other priests, his face was seen to shine with a brilliant light during the Great Entrance. This so impressed another priest that he made inquiries as to who he was, and wrote about it in one of his books. Only several years after his death, when the miracles through his

relics and his prayers, proved his sanctity, did knowledge of and love for this saint begin to grow. The greater part of his own little flock had never doubted his sanctity.

Cappadocia, the south eastern part of Asia Minor, is mentioned frequently by St Paul. It had been colonized by Greeks, as had much of the coastline round the Black Sea, 2,000 years before and was early converted to Christianity. Many well-known saints originated from this area, such as St Nicolas, St Basil the Great, and St Gregory the Theologian. By the fifteenth century, the whole land had gradually been overrun by the Turks, who in 1453 had captured the Byzantine Empire's political and religious centre, Constantinople. From that time on, the Greeks lived in fear of the Turks. Many converted to Islam, some were martyred, some remained Christian in secret. All were persecuted and despised. After the disastrous military campaign of the Greeks against the Turks in 1922, a treaty was arranged for the mass exchange of Turks living in Greece and Greeks living in Turkey. There are horrifying stories of slaughter by the war-like Turks during this difficult period.

Prior to this "population exchange," there were numbers of Greek villages in central Cappadocia, not far from Kayseri (Caesarea), where simple peasant farmers lived, isolated from the world, surrounded by hostile Turks who took every opportunity to attack and kill in the hope of loot or of seizing their land. In Farasa, the largest village, Fr Arsenius was born in 1840. He was orphaned at an early age, and brought up by his aunt. When he was quite young, his older brother was taking him across a swift river, when the torrent carried him away. In terror his brother prayed to St George to save him, and within a few moments he saw him on the bank beside him, smiling. He told him that a monk on horseback had picked him up, put him on his horse and set him down on dry land. The incident affected both of them very strongly. Arsenius decided that he too would become a monk.

After studying in Smyrna, he entered a monastery, but not for long as he was soon ordained deacon and sent back to his native Farasa to try to combat illiteracy in the six nearby villages. This was not an easy task because of the suspicious Turks, who never left them in peace. He taught the children as they knelt on sheepskins, so that the Turks thought that they were praying. More frequently they went secretly to one of the chapels cut high up in the limestone cliff. There they learned from the Gospel and the services, practised the Jesus Prayer and the hymn to the Mother of God, and made their own prayer-ropes for counting their prostrations. He was ordained priest at the age of thirty, and continued as the shepherd of these villages for over fifty years. Not only did he perform the usual priestly offices, but he was also the protector and healer of all, both of soul and body. There was no doctor in the whole countryside, and the people felt no need of one. They had simply to go to him, tell him of their pain or sickness, whereupon he would read a prayer over them and so heal them. These miracles were so frequent that the less pious folk simply regarded them as normal. The more pious sensed his fervour, and would say, "His prayer would make a hole in a stone!" If Father Arsenius was in retreat in his cell, as on every Wednesday and Friday, to avoid disturbing him unnecessarily they would take a little earth from his threshold and rub it on the affected part, and would be healed. Even a blind Turkish woman, who did not know their customs and kept knocking at his door on a Wednesday, was told to put the earth on her eyes, and she recovered her sight.

Fr Arsenius' cell was simple, with just a bare earth floor, an icon shelf with an ever-burning lamp, a shelf for books, two coverlets instead of a bed, and a rug for kneeling when in prayer or studying. For food, he made himself barley rolls once a month, moistening them as required. On fast days he neither ate nor drank until after sunset. If out of love he ate other food with someone, he would punish himself later in his own cell.

So great was his love and compassion for all suffering humanity, that Turks frequently came to him for healing or for deliverance from demonic possession. His love extended to animals also, so that no matter how tired or footsore he was (and he always walked barefoot on the stony earth roads) he persistently refused to ride on a donkey in case he might tire it. Christ had walked everywhere and only once sat on a donkey on Palm Sunday. His care for his sheep entailed much walking. Fearing that some might weaken in their faith or even apostatise through fear of the Turks, he frequently visited the outlying villages not only for services but to boost their morale, to heal their sick, help them with their troubles and strengthen their faith.

The Turks were no match for the Greeks in a fight except when the men had drunk too much and become quarrelsome, which frequently happened on feastsdays or at nameday parties. To avoid this he sometimes baptized children with such names as "Freedom," "Jerusalem," or even "Athens." His intention was misunderstood, but he bore it patiently. On feastsdays or winter evenings he would gather the men together in his cell and would tell them stories from the Bible or lives of the saints, which they would relate to their own families.

Most of the villagers regarded him as a saint, and the women adored him. He often pretended to be irritable, gluttonous, or just quirky, fearing their praise more than anything. With the women he was sometimes difficult, even harsh, to put them off when they tried to do things for him. But mostly they saw through this; his holiness was too evident. He refused to admit barren women and instead they would send him a dress or girdle for him to bless. A year later they would give birth. He gave his own name to one child to be baptized, prophesying that he would become a monk, which became true. It was this future monk who, 35 years after Father Arsenius' death, found his relics and took them for safe keeping, first to his own monastery and later to a Convent near Salonika. Out of his great love for his spiritual father, he then wrote a small book of his life and miracles, which soon became well known all over Greece.

It would be impossible to recount all his miracles, they were so numerous. His power to heal and to drive out demons was known throughout the whole neighbourhood, so that frequently Turks came to ask his help. More than once Turks came to rob him, thinking that he must have received money or gifts in thanks for his healing, but he had always refused to accept anything. On one occasion, several thieves broke in while he was in prayer and started to search for money. Ignoring them, he continued to pray. When they tried to get out, they went round and round as if blinded or mad, unable to find the door. Finally they sensed the power which was preventing them and begged his forgiveness with tears. Another time two robbers waited outside while their companion tried to go in. One glance from Fr Arsenius, as he put his foot inside, was enough to root him to the spot. After a long wait his friends became anxious and entered. When they saw the other thief immobilised and begging

for help, they were very frightened and repented. Other Turks were warned not to try to rob Fr Arsenius.

From time to time Turks would rob the church. The Greeks came running to Fr Arsenius in tears when they found the silver plate stolen. He calmed them, saying, "Don't worry - they'll bring it back!" And they soon did. After going a short way, a dense black cloud suddenly enveloped them, so that they had to turn back. When it cleared, they assumed it to be natural and tried to get away again. This time invisible hands beat them constantly, so in terror they cried out to the villagers to take the stolen goods from them as they were too busy defending themselves from the blows. Another time, one Turk stole things from the church. Fr Arsenius saw him, and before he could make another step, the man became paralyzed and possessed. Fr Arsenius left him like that for a time in order to teach him a lesson, then healed him. No wonder the Turks spread the news of the power Christians had.

On one of his frequent visits to another village, where some Greeks lived, a group of Turks barred the way. He turned back, saying to his companions, "Within a few minutes, they will come and beg forgiveness." Within a few minutes a terrible storm hit the village, frightening in its intensity. The group of Turks understood, came on horseback to Fr Arsenius, and falling at his feet, begged his forgiveness. Thereat the storm ceased and Fr Arsenius continued his visit in peace.

This good shepherd not only taught his people the true Orthodox faith, but also had to protect them from errors caused by their mingling with the Turks, and even more from Protestants, who came with the Gospel, trying to lead others, particularly the children, into their own heretical way of thinking. One such Protestant came to the village as a teacher and started to undermine the beliefs of simple people. Fr Arsenius warned his flock strongly of God's punishment that would befall anyone who so much as greeted this Protestant. The latter was aware of their hostility, and soon left the village.

Many of the Farasiotes had fields far away from their village, where they stayed all Summer. There was a chapel to Saint Michael the Archangel nearby, kept locked to prevent its desecration by the Turks. Fr Arsenius came there occasionally to bless their fields. When anyone fell sick or was suffering some pain, being unable to go to Fr Arsenius for healing as he was so far away, they would take a thread or a rag from the affected part and tie it to the branch of a tree that grew outside the chapel door, praying to the Archangel for relief. Their faith was strong, and they were healed. With time, the tree became covered with little rags. One day a rich man returned to visit his native village. Unfortunately he had lost his faith and considered himself superior to the local inhabitants. He began to subvert their faith and mocked them for their superstitions, even persuading one young man to cut down the tree. At this moment Fr Arsenius returned from blessing the fields, and was distressed to see such harm being done to his flock. "I'm sending you back where you came from," he said severely. Almost at once there came a whirlwind which enveloped the atheist, and he vanished from sight. His distressed relatives were consoled when Fr Arsenius assured them that he was safely back in his shop. Some years later this was confirmed.

Even the elements responded to Fr Arsenius' prayers. Beside the man church was a spring of water from a rock above which fell like a waterfall into the stream below. Sometimes it flowed, sometimes it was dry. When water was required, whether

for the Liturgy or for drinking, and the spring was dry, someone only had to call Fr Arsenius, who came with the Gospel, said a short prayer, and the water flowed immediately. No one was surprised, because this happened so frequently.

One evening Fr Arsenius was walking with a few villagers to a different chapel for a Vigil. He had been delayed, as so many people needed his help, and dusk was falling. After a time, those with him began to stumble and complain. Fr Arsenius asked them what was the trouble. "Forgive us, Father, but we can't see." "Why, can't you see the bright shining light in front of us?" They couldn't, so he helped them by holding hands.

The Turks were always looking for an opportunity to attack the village. One day when most of the men were away working in the fields, a large armed band approached. The women and children ran terrified to Fr Arsenius. "Don't worry," he consoled them, "St John Chrysostom won't let them cross the bridge." Just below St John Chrysostom's chapel, where they stood, was a deep ravine. As the ferocious band started to cross the bridge, they saw the Saint barring their way. In terror they all fled and did not return.

Another day over 300 Turkish deserters, fully armed, attacked the village, captured and tortured the head man, asking a large sum of money for his ransom. When told that the money was with the priest, they went to demand it from him. Fr Arsenius had a small amount of church money brought in a bag and he confronted the band. He called them rotten Turks and criminals, threatening that he would turn them into stone if they didn't release their prisoner and depart. The angry captain raised his scimitar to kill him, whereupon both he and the whole mob were immobilised like stone statues. They became frightened, begged for forgiveness and acknowledged that they were evil men. When released from their invisible bonds, they did not even bend down to take the small bag of coins offered them. A few were so affected by this incident that later on they became secret Christians.

One of the wives of the sole Turk who lived in Farasa secretly expressed a desire to become a Christian. A village woman who afterwards became her godmother instructed her. After her Baptism, she pretended to be indisposed. Before very long she fell seriously ill and her godmother became anxious because the Turkish women were accustomed to wash the body before burial as a kind of baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Fr Arsenius continued to pray. As expected, the Turkish women came to wash her after her death, but every time they stretched out their hands, they became paralyzed. Finally they gave up and buried her unwashed, while Fr Arsenius read the burial service in his cell. From that time on the family had no peace. She appeared to them night after night, turning the whole house upside down, telling them to stop torturing her and to take her body and bury it in the Christian cemetery. When he could bear it no longer, her husband came distraught to Fr Arsenius and begged him to bury his wife in the Christian cemetery. Finally Fr Arsenius agreed, whereupon the apparitions and turmoil ceased.

Whenever one of his parishioners, who loved Fr Arsenius so much and saw his suffer physically on their behalf, tried to make things easier for him, he would always say, "Don't pay attention to me. I'm a monk." But God paid attention. After the Liturgy at a chapel which was cut out of the limestone cliff high up as a protection against the Turks, Fr Arsenius came out onto the little balcony. A plank worked loose and he fell

over sixty yards into the gorge below, unnoticed by anyone except a farmer ploughing on the other side of the gorge. Running in horror towards the body, he found him still alive. "Don't touch me; I'm alright." He lay a few minutes in rapture, then got to his feet and re-climbed the 160 steps back to the chapel. Later he said that a Woman had held him like a baby in her arms and gently laid him down. The faithful servant of God had not yet completed his service.

For several years he had been telling his sheep that they would all have to leave their homes and go back to their mother-land, Greece. He would go with them, but after 40 days he would die on an island - which indeed happened. He knew how hard the evacuation and resettlement would be. As the time approached, they made their preparations. Fr Arsenius, who was already 83 years old, hid the sacred vessels to avoid their pollution by the Turks, taking with him only the holy relics of St John Chrysostom. The walk to the coast would take five days. They had prepared a docile animal for him, but he insisted on walking barefoot all the time, encouraging them, comforting them, without a thought for himself, while the jubilant Turkish soldiers harassed them unceasingly. One captain shouted something rude about Fr Arsenius. He hadn't gone five yards before he fell off his horse. Even the toughest Turk was forced to respect and fear the power of the Christians. In spite of his exhaustion, en route Fr Arsenius healed any sick and exorcised the demonic in the villages that they went through, as well as conducting services, so that the flock felt that God had not deserted them. Finally they embarked at Mersina for the voyage to Corfu, where a camp had been set up for them. Fr Arsenius protected them to the very end. From there they would be scattered and life would be very hard for them, but he would be continuing to support them by his prayers in Heaven. He lived only two weeks longer with them, sharing their hardships, and then was taken ill. His flock insisted on him going to hospital, where he died not long after. His last day, which he foreknew, he spent alone with God, Whom he had loved and served faithfully for so long. The Farasiotes were inconsolable, their spiritual father, teacher, protector and healer had gone. They buried him in the Corfu cemetery with tears of love.

Miracles did not cease with his death. In the Convent, where his relics later lay unknown to anyone - even the Abbess thought the case contained vestments - the Saint appeared in a vision to two different Sisters, whereupon his identity was disclosed. From that time on miracles increased. He was glorified in 1986 for his sacrificial life, having spent more than fifty years "sanctifying, teaching and confirming in the Faith and piety of the Fathers the sorely troubled Orthodox people of the region of Farasa, whom he accompanied when stricken in years in their exodus from their native land," as is declared in the synodical decree of his glorification. The day of his death, 10th November, is the date of his celebration. May the prayers of the meek, God-loving Saint Arsenius increase our own faith in and love of God.

Contributed by Mother Pelagia
Lesna Icon Convent, Normandy, France

A fuller life of Saint Arsenius has been published in English by the Convent of the Evangelist John the Theologian, Souroti, Thessalonica, Greece.

CONCERNING PRAYER

Its Inner Qualities and Outer Effects

Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1)

According to the Teaching of the Sacred Scriptures,
the Holy Fathers, and the Teachers and Writers of the Church

A Translation from a Booklet Published
by the Russian Skete of the Prophet Elias on Mount Athos.

Translation by Mrs Valentina B. Merritt of Brookwood, Surrey

Continuation from the last issue

5. Tears

He had offered up prayers and supplications with ... tears (Heb. 5:7)

What is the sign that purity has begun to appear in the heart? When a man is deemed worthy to receive the gift of abundant tears which come over him without effort. For tears are established for the mind as a kind of boundary between what is bodily and what is spiritual, and between passionateness and purity. Until a man receives this gift, the activity of his work is still in the outer man and he has not yet at all perceived the activity of the hidden things of the spiritual man - *Venerable Isaac the Syrian*.

Tears during prayer are a sign that the soul has been deemed worthy of God's mercy in her repentance, and that her repentance has been accepted, and through her tears the soul has begun to enter into the plain of limpid purity - *Ibid*.

When during the time of the service (the prayer rule), you are granted the gift of the sweetness of tears, do not call it slackness in prayer, because the grace of tears is the fullness of prayer - *Ibid*.

There are tears that burn and there are tears that anoint as if with oil. All tears that flow out of contrition and anguish of heart on account of sins dry up and burn the body. At first a man must necessarily come to this order of tears and through them a door is opened unto him to enter into the second order, which is superior to the first; this is the realm wherein a man receives mercy. These are the tears that are shed because of insight; they make the body comely and anoint it as if with oil, and they pour forth by themselves without compulsion - *Ibid*.

The saints continued in weeping. If the saints wept, and if, until they were translated from this life, their eyes were always full of tears, then who would not weep? If those who were perfect and victorious wept here, then how can those who are covered in sores cease from weeping? He who has a corpse lying before him, or he who realizes that he is dead in sin, can one think that such an one needs to be taught how to use his tears? Your soul, which is more precious to you than the whole world, is dead in sin, and it lies before you; does this fact not necessitate your weeping? Because if we obtain this blessing [weeping], with its help we shall achieve purity. He who weeps cannot be disturbed by the passions - *Ibid*.

The beginning of a good life is tears during prayer. Tears during prayer are a great gift. Pray to God, pouring out tears before His grace, then your prayer will be as *incense* (Ps. 140) before Him - *Venerable Ephraim the Syrian*.

Water hoses are put into action when there is a fire, and tears during temptation. Water douses the flames, and tears during prayer douse evil desires - *Ibid*.

Use tears, as a tool to receive your every petition. For the Master rejoices when you pray with tears - *Venerable Nilus of Sinai*.

When during prayer you are shedding a fountain of tears, in no way become conceited as if you were higher than others. Your prayer has vouchsafed you this aid, so that you could more readily and sincerely confess your sins and with your tears propitiate the Master. But don't turn your weapon against the passions into a passion, lest you further anger Him Who gave this gift (i.e. tears) to you - *Ibid*.

From the outpouring of tears for their sins, many, who forget the purpose of this, become filled with fury and are deflected (from the right way: which does not mean they become mad, but that they become extremely puffed up with pride) - *Ibid*.

The Holy Fathers conjoin all the work of the monk, all his life, with weeping. What does a monk's weeping mean? It is his prayer. *The Holy Spirit*, when He abides in a man, *maketh intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered*. If, when He abides in us, the Holy Spirit mourns concerning us, then all the more, before we receive this All-holy Stranger within, we should weep for ourselves. Weeping should be an inalienable characteristic of our prayer, its constant and inseparable companion and facilitator, its very soul - *Blessed Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov*.

He who combines weeping with prayer struggles according to the precepts of God Himself; he struggles properly, lawfully. When the time comes, he will reap an abundant harvest: the joy of salvation assured. Those who deprive their prayer of weeping labour in opposition to the commandments of God; they will not reap such a harvest. Furthermore, they will harvest the tares of self-opinion, self-delusion and destruction - *Ibid*.

The heart of those who pour forth tears of tenderness is illuminated with the rays of the Son of righteousness, Christ God - *Venerable Seraphim of Sarov*.

... to be continued with "*Humility and Meekness*"...

NEW RECOMMENDED BOOK

2000 YEARS OF CHRIST'S POWER:

Part Two: The Middle Ages,
by Dr N. R. Needham,

*published by Grace Publications Trust, London, 2000,
softback , 456 pages, £13.95.*

WE PUBLISHED a notice regarding Part One of this series in our November 1998 issue. Now this has been followed by Part Two, which covers the period from the rise of Islam in the seventh century to the fourteenth century Roman Catholic mystics. Like its predecessor, this book is written with great clarity of expression, and will help

students of church history through the many tortuous twists and turns of the medieval period. Because of the schism of what was to become the Roman Catholic Church from Orthodoxy, and the enormous changes in Western Christendom which followed that division, much more of this book falls outside the immediate scope of the Orthodox world. This in itself should commend the book to Orthodox Christian readers, for it would be folly for us to develop some kind of ghetto mentality and confine ourselves exclusively to Orthodox church history. We need to know and understand the Christian history of the post-Orthodox West, effectively to be able to fulfil our mission towards them and to recall them to Orthodoxy. This volume follows the same format as the previous one, ending each chapter with lengthy extracts from the spiritual writers of the period. In one sense the book is something like the Authorized Version of the Bible: it is generally excellent but occasionally the author's Protestantism peeps through. We recommend it to our readers. You may obtain copies from our bookstall at £ 13.95 plus, if you are ordering by post, 15% p&p. Make cheques for £ 16.05 payable to Saint Edward Brotherhood. Otherwise order from any good book shop.

THE COMING MONTH

IN NOVEMBER, we celebrate the Great Feast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple (21st November/4th December):

Troparion in the Fourth Tone

TODAY is the prelude of God's good will
and the heralding of the salvation of mankind.
In the temple of God, the Virgin is presented openly,
and she proclaimeth Christ unto all.
To her, then, with a great voice let us cry aloud:
Rejoice, O thou fulfilment of the Creator's dispensation.

Contakion in the Fourth Tone

THE MOST PURE TEMPLE of the Saviour,
the most precious bridal chamber and Virgin,
the sacred treasury of the glory of God,
is on this day brought into the house of the Lord,
bringing with her the grace that is in the Divine Spirit.
And the Angels of God chant praise unto her:
She is the heavenly tabernacle.

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

"I'm sending a press cutting which shows that, according to recent surveys, elderly people are losing their faith and can no longer be counted on by the churches to boost their numbers [The Observer, 3/9/00: report of Ben Summerskill]. Do you have any thoughts on this? I remember reading somewhere that during the Soviet period in Russia a churchman was asked what would happen when the babushkas who then filled the churches died out, and he replied that there would be another batch of babushkas. I'm not sure if these latest statistics apply to Orthodox Christians, but they seem to indicate that at least here in the West this will no longer be the case." - D.P., Reading, Berks.

I have a very strong aversion to statistics, polls, surveys and the like, because, it seems, that they can be engineered to "prove" anything you like. Nonetheless I suspect that in this instance the survey is substantially correct. Before I say why, let me throw in two warnings about this type of survey.

First, the report is based on the views of 340 people aged over 65 -this is not a broad cross-section of society, and one would have thought that with such a narrow survey the findings would not carry much weight. It claims that over a twenty year period, the percentage of elderly people who felt that religion was important for them has fallen from almost 75 to less than 50%. Further, it claims that involvement in organised religion in this age-group has also slumped.

Second, one would have to know how the questions were framed. For instance, if asked if you have faith in God, the "man in the street" could answer in a number of ways. What does "faith" mean here? For one man, it might mean that he is prepared to accept that there might be a deity; for another that he believes there actually is a god; for a third that he believes in one God; for another that he believes in God as revealed in Christian tradition in its widest sense but does not let this "belief" substantially alter his life; for another that he believes so assuredly in God that he permits this belief to order his life. All four men might only have the opportunity to tick the box "Yes," and the survey would not indicate that they each meant different things in replying to the one question.

As I have said, nonetheless I suspect that the findings of the survey are substantially true, and there are a number of reasons for this. First of all, social constraints have altered in the last twenty years, and so whereas then many might have considered the "right" answer to be that religion is important to them, now many more might feel freer to be more honest. Secondly, in the past generation religion and its adherents, particularly the Christian religion, have been very strongly attacked and ridiculed in the media. Such attacks do have their successes. Thirdly, particularly following the so-called Thatcher revolution, with the subverting of some of the last Christian underpinning of our society, materialism has gained ground enormously. Following on from this, people are now more and more distracted. Juvenal is said to have characterized decadent society by the earnest desire of its peoples for bread and circuses. Today, except for a growing underclass, most people in our society have bread enough and it probably does not exercise them too much, but luxuries and circuses are the order of the day. The fact that we built a Millennium Dome and do not properly fund hospitals is symptomatic of this, as is our ceaseless preoccupation with

entertainments, holidays, comfort, ease, titillation, celebrity. All these things crowd out religion. All these things tie us to a This-Worldly commitment rather than to an Other-Worldly aspiration.

Furthermore, in the heterodox congregations themselves, there has been such a cult of youth and of relevance, that one can imagine that many of the more elderly members of their flocks have felt marginalized and unwanted, certainly not at home with contemporary expressions of worship.

Such is the situation in society around us and briefly within the other denominations. But we must also look within Orthodoxy and within ourselves as well. Undoubtedly, there has been a similar leakage within Orthodoxy in this country, and I would think that it looks set to continue. Of course, Orthodox Christians are under the same social pressures as their non-Orthodox peers. Modernisation of traditional forms of worship will not have played such an important role in the leakage of committed members. But there are five things at least I can think of to mention here:

The first is the opposite of what has happened among the heterodox, and is the mere formalization of worship: simply performing the rites, simply keeping to the form, keeping outward disciplines and rules, without otherwise instructing the people, without teaching them the fundamentals of their Faith or the need to pray and develop their own spiritual lives.

The second is the strong identity with the culture, concerns, and sometimes sadly even political issues, of an ethnic motherland, which second and third generation descendants of immigrants feel have little significance in their lives. Following on immediately from this, one has whole congregations worshipping in languages that they cannot comprehend, and often even being preached to in languages they do not understand, and so they fail to receive the word.

Thirdly, there is the failure of Orthodoxy, as it is lived, to remain true to itself and its own traditions. It has largely indeed become just "another denomination," with the same one-day-in-seven approach to religious practice that has distinguished the more moribund manifestations of Protestantism in this country for decades. It has forgotten its aspirations. When is virginity (such a mark of the Early Church) preached now? Why is monasticism thought of as an prized but rather exotic side-salad to the main course of Orthodox life? Why do our people not feel called to sanctity?

The fourth is that the Orthodox have learnt extremely well the lessons of the complaint/offence culture that infects society around us. Instead of bearing with one another, trying to help one another, seeing ourselves as a band of people together undergoing therapy and needing each other's support, help and forbearance, we have adopted the standards of consumer society. We make demands of the Church, of the clergy, of our fellow believers, and we expect those demands to be met, otherwise we are offended. We expect things to be done as and how we wish; we judge others and never ourselves; we know our rights and will have them. Following this path, we can demand everything, but we receive nothing. That fact becomes clear to us at some stage, and rather than taking the long and arduous path of repentance, we reject what we should hold dearer than life itself.

Fifthly, we have forgotten the virtues of faithfulness, of resoluteness, of perseverance, of remaining true to the promises that we have made. I remember myself being quite surprised, but surprised unto edification, by a comment made by someone whom I was telling about the lapse from Orthodoxy of a third party. Her immediate, and proper, remark was: "I can't understand it. When he was received, he promised to remain faithful unto his life's end." It is the greatest pity that nowadays we can too readily understand someone not remaining faithful to their commitments and promises, and it is this lady's forthrightness that strikes us as odd. We have forgotten that the life of faith is a struggle, as the Fathers had it, a contest in the arena, for which we shall be judged in the next life. Struggles and contests are not easy.

This brings us to look inside ourselves. Faith is not just a possession, like a vase, which one can keep or dispose of. If anything, rather than being like the vase, it is more like a living plant. It requires attention, care, nurture. If one does not care for one's Faith, it will die and wither. If one never studies the Scriptures, attends church, goes to confession, receives the Mysteries, practises the virtues and contends against one's passions, our faith, like an untended plant, will wither and die. Hearing of the falling away from faith of the elderly, we should not simply wring our hands and deplore current trends. It should be a warning to us, and a call to tend to ourselves.

Nor should we be surprised by the findings of this report or by witnessing a like falling away within the Orthodox churches. There are two things that we must bear in mind. God is not democratically elected! He does not exist any less because fewer people believe in Him. Even if only one person should believe in Him with Orthodox faith in the whole country; that one person would be right. He/she would constitute the plenitude of piety here. And then again, the apostasy is to be expected. Speaking of it, the Saviour Himself asks: "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"

CHANIA STATEMENT

THE NORTH AMERICAN Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops held their 17th meeting at Chania, Crete, from 2nd to 4th October, at the end of which they issued a "Statement on the Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue at the Dawn of a New Millennium." The statement really adds nothing to our knowledge, and largely consists in a string of pious platitudes. It does cause one to wonder where the people who participate in such conferences live. It is not in the Real World! Like the Eurocrats in the political sphere, the Ecumenicrats seem to live on a completely different sphere to the rest of us. This "Dawn" statement, for instance, in referring to the lifting of the anathemas by the Pope and the then Œcumenical Patriarch Athenagoras on 7th December, 1965, says: "Those excommunications were reversed, to be replaced by relationships of love -they were 'erased from the memory of the Church' and Consigned to oblivion." This is manifestly untrue. Even the local Orthodox Churches which are fully supportive of the ecumenical dialogue between Rome and Orthodoxy have not consigned the excommunications to oblivion; they still have not entered into communion with one another after 35 years. Many Orthodox, even within the Œcumenical Patriarchate itself, whose Patriarch withdrew the anathemas, do not accept his action as proper or binding on the whole Orthodox Church. Surely there is a

need for a true ecumenism, through which we can speak honestly and openly with each other and not in what appears to be an ecclesiastical version of PC.

SERBIA

TO A MAN, our readers will doubtless know of the ousting of Milosevic and his replacement as President of Yugoslavia by Vojislav Kostunica. We hope and pray that this might provide a basis for the material and, more particularly, the spiritual rebirth of the country. What most probably will not have been generally noticed is that although the elections were held earlier, it was not for some time that the Serbs were able to replace the President, and when it happened it happened at the turn of first and second weeks of October. At this very time, on 7th October (24th September on the church calendar) the Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of St Stephen the First-crowned King of Serbia, who was renamed Simon in the monastic schema, his brother Dimitrije, who also became a monk and was renamed David, and the holy Prince Vladislav, the son of Stephen. On 9th October, we also had the commemoration of King Alexander of Yugoslavia who was assassinated in 1934. May the prayers of these Saints and of their righteous King, now aid the Serbian faithful.

Serbian Orthodox spokesmen have accused Muslim soldiers from the United Arab Emirates, serving with the K-For peacekeeping force in Kosovo, of allowing Albanian extremists to destroy Orthodox Christian shrines. The allegations have been described by the Keston Institute as being "worth taking very seriously." In the past the Serbs have accused the K-For forces of being ineffective in their defence of Orthodox holy places, but not of deliberate wrong-doing.

Since the war ended in Kosovo, over one hundred churches and monasteries in that region have been destroyed.

"SISTER CHURCHES"

THE VATICAN Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has published a "Note" accompanied by a letter from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who explains that the Note is issued with papal authority. The Note traces the history and usage of the expression "sister churches" and cautions against what the Vatican considers to be its improper use. The Vatican expresses concern that a "theology of sister churches" is being promulgated which contradicts their belief in One Church and their belief that the Roman Catholic Church is that One Church. The text of the Note was kindly sent us by a reader who expressed some hesitation at our noting something positive in the more controversial "Dominus Iesus." Perhaps we did not explain our thought clearly there. We did not wish to suggest that its publication brought Roman Catholicism any nearer to Orthodoxy, but rather that it seemed to be a return to their old self-definition after a period of ecumenical obfuscation. The Note on the usage of sister church terminology would seem at first glance to further distance the Roman Catholics from the Orthodox, but at a deeper level perhaps it will not, because it is a truer expression of how they see themselves. It highlights the differences between us, but in doing so throws them into clearer perspective. We are beginning to deal with fundamentals and not with ecumenical "spin." That surely is a positive step, even if it might seem hurtful at first. Perhaps too they will be more ready to hear Orthodox spokesmen who speak

to them the word of truth, rather than those who have been following ecumenism's programme.

TENSION BETWEEN CONSTANTINOPLE AND MOSCOW

IN THE UKRAINE, there are some 14,000 Orthodox parishes, of which the majority (8,000) are within the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. The remaining 6,000 are within the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP).

Naturally the situation causes distress to the believers. According to a report in "The Sentinel," the situation has been exacerbated by the Patriarchate of Constantinople emphasizing historic links between their church and the Ukraine, causing tensions between the administrations of the two Patriarchates. Hopes have been expressed that the three jurisdictions could be united into one Ukrainian Church. If this were done, under the auspices of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Throne, would feel its position within world Orthodoxy strengthened as the resulting Ukrainian Church would be the largest national Orthodox Church in the world, and would doubtless feel itself to be a daughter Church of Constantinople's. The Sobor of the Moscow Hierarchs held in Moscow in August refused even to discuss the possibility of allowing its Ukrainian parishes autonomy, which is seen as a step towards allowing their parishes the possibility of uniting with those of the other two jurisdictions. The report states that the Russian Orthodox Church in the Ukraine (MP) "has allies among the left and pro-Slavic union political groups, and ironically, its most ardent supporter is the Communist Party of Ukraine."

NUNS TONSURED IN CANADA

HAPPIER NEWS from Canada: according to the "Canadian Orthodox Herald" (No 12 September 2000), two novices were tonsured rasophor nuns on the feast of the Annunciation at the small community of the Skete of the Protection of the Mother of God in Bluffton, Alberta. Bishop Michael of Toronto visited the Convent for the feast and tonsured the nuns, naming Sisters Macrina and Elizabeth, Paisia and Gabriela. According to their superior, Mother Amvrosia, this now brings the total of the sisterhood to seven: two stavrophor nuns, two rasophors and three novices.

BIBLICAL CITY FOUND

THE SUNDAY TIMES (1/10/00) reports the finding of the ancient city Marib, Yemen, thought to be the capital of the Queen of Sheba, who visited King Solomon and who is commended by our Saviour in Matthew 12:42. The site has been known for at least 100 years, but hostile climate and a hostile political situations have hitherto prevented a careful study. Now an international team, including researchers from London's Institute of Archaeology, have used radar to detect the ruins beneath the sands. In this way they will be able to identify the most important buildings in a site which is at least a kilometre across and could be twice that size.

LAST ORTHODOX PRIEST IN CHINA DIES

FATHER GREGORY ZHOU, the pastor of the Church of the Protection in the city of Harbin, the last Orthodox priest serving in the People's Republic of China, has died. The information that we have reveals that the regional authorities had refused permission to another Orthodox priest to visit and chant the funeral service for the departed Father Gregory, although, as Fr Gregory died at the beginning of October, the situation might well have changed before this issue reaches our readers. May Father Gregory find rest with the Saints.

RUSSIA

WE AVOID political comments in "The Shepherd," but as it is so apposite, and it is not a party-political issue, we thought that we might include this one witty comment from one of our correspondents in Russia.

He writes: - "As for Mr Putin:

I like the Walrus best' said Alice; 'because he was a little sorry for the poor oysters.'

'He ate more than the carpenter, though,' said Tweedledee.

The carpenter is Mr Yeltsin; the Walrus is Mr Putin. He is very sorry for the poor Russians."

BROOKWOOD NEWS

MARRIAGE: In the afternoon of Sunday, 1st October, our parishioner Irina Hoble was married to Peter Aldersley at Saint Edward's Church. Father Peter Bauk was the celebrant at the mystery, and afterwards relatives and guests were invited to a reception in the main hall of the house. May the Lord grant Peter and Irina grace to remain steadfast, faithful to each other, to overcome all trials and temptations in their married life ahead, and may He also grant them a foretaste of that joy which is laid up for those who shall inherit the Kingdom. Many Years! Peter and Irina have specially asked us to thank all parishioners and friends for the gifts and the support that they gave them on their wedding day.

DAY CONFERENCE: Frs. Alexis and Niphon attended a day conference held at Minster Abbey on Saturday 30th September. The conference was part of a longer convention of Benedictines hosted by the sisters of the abbey, and it consisted primarily of presentations on the lives of three "Prophets of Reunion:" Dom Constantine Bosshaerts, given by Sister Esther, O.S.B. of Turvey Abbey; Dom Lambert Beaudouin, given by Fr Emmanuel, and Dom Bede Winslow, given by Sister Benedicta of Minster. A *byo* lunch was held in the local school room. Three other Orthodox attended, two monks from Balamand and a student from the university there.

TALK: On Thursday 12th October, Father Alexis gave a talk to some 35 people, gathered from various churches in the Guildford area. The talk was given at the invitation of the Reverend Dr Andrew Norman, the rector of St Nicolas Church, Guildford, and was held in their church hall. The title of the talk was "Praying with the

Saints," and it was part of the parish's "School of Prayer" programme. Afterwards, participants continued to ask questions for about an hour, and then, more informally, over coffee, individuals had an opportunity to ask questions without having to voice them from the floor.

APOLOGIES: Lately we have had rather a lot of hospital visiting, and so apologise to any of you who have been waiting for answers to letters or please forgive us and pray for us.

STOP PRESS

We have to report that on 1st November, Sir Steven Runciman, the eminent historian of Byzantium and close friend of the Orthodox Church died. We ask for the prayers of all the Faithful for him.

PRACTICAL TIP

IF YOU HAVE CHILDREN, get them as involved in church life as widely as possible and as early an age as possible. Don't leave their church education to the Sunday School and just hanging around at the back during services. They will not grow up to love the church or feel part of it. If they are boys, don't think that simply by getting them to serve in the altar they are being cared for spiritually, and that thus and by forcing them to go to confession occasionally you have successfully abdicated all your responsibilities to the clergy. The primary responsibility for the spiritual education of children, as with their moral education, rests with their parents. It needs constant attention, and it requires that you take any and every opportunity that life affords. Even in the smallest things you can get even small children to participate. For instance, adults usually put a contribution in the alms box to help support the church -give you children some money to do the same, and not just watch you do it, so that they learn to give alms; teach them some of the hymns, how to make koliva or prosphora; have them come with you to help clean in the church, arrange flowers, prepare festal and fasting foods. Most of all take every opportunity to explain things to them, and to lead them on from the simple outward things to a deeper understanding of their Faith. Nowadays we do not have the ancient frescoed cathedrals, or the magnificent choirs, and the great pageantry of earlier centuries. As a "spectator sport" Orthodoxy in the average parish church is pretty boring. When compared to what the world offers today; it is extremely so! Therefore it is vital that your children and brought into the life of the church as closely as possible, and that they are at the very least given a taste of that which lies beyond those outward things.