

# Orthodox Contact

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## Sunday of Orthodoxy

*We venerate your holy icon, O gracious Lord, and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ our God. For You of your own good will were pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh, so to deliver from the bondage of the enemy those whom You had fashioned. Therefore in thanksgiving we cry out to You: You have filled all things with joy, O our Saviour, when You have come to save the world.*

## Timothy's Journey

Orthodoxy is new to Singapore and to Southeast Asia as a whole. I was baptised by Singapore's first resident Orthodox priest, Fr Daniel Toyne about three years ago and joined myself to a tradition that stretches 2000 years. Having decided to come to Melbourne to further my studies, (I am doing architecture at the University of Melbourne). I saw in this an opportunity to meet the variety of ethnic groups who call themselves Orthodox. Often this ended up in funny experiences.

One night, about a year and a half ago, I attended a dinner and dance organised by the Greek Orthodox youth committee. Having found my seat, I found myself next to an old Greek woman. She looked at me intently for a while before asking, "Are you from Russia?"

"No" came the reply, "I'm Chinese."

"You're Chinese?!" she exclaimed, clapping her hand together. I was not surprised at her reaction. Hundreds of people were just as surprised as she was. The Orthodox Church is not known to have Chinese members. (We do have Orthodox believers in China, but they operate underground.) Then came the next question.

“How did you become Orthodox?”

Like the old woman, many people (even non-Orthodox!) had the idea that to be Orthodox, you had to be Greek, Arab, Russian, Serbian, Romanian etc. Nobody had the slightest notion that a Chinese Singaporean could be Orthodox unless through a mixed marriage. Yet here I am, an Asian convert to Orthodoxy. How often we forget the words of Christ and His Apostles, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” John 12:32, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free...” Galatians 3:28... Anybody can become Orthodox.

I attend St Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church which is under the omophorion of His Eminence Metropolitan Archbishop Paul Saliba. Besides me and a Malaysian lady who is married to the son of the priest pastoring St Nicholas, Fr Dimitri (in the Orthodox Church clergy are allowed to be married but before ordination), the congregation is mostly made up of a rich variety of peoples whom I seldom meet in Singapore: Lebanese, Syrians, Egyptians, Kuwaitis, Australians etc.

English and Arabic are both used in this parish which are alternated in the services. Service booklets are printed in both languages too so that no one will get lost in the services. The music used in the services is the Byzantine chant which has its roots in Greek, Roman and Middle Eastern tunes. As I am learning this ancient music, I often take samples back home to listen (I sing in the parish choir and have picked up some Arabic words as a result!). I hope to share this with my home parish when I return to Singapore.

Worshipping with a predominantly Middle Eastern congregation has also opened my mind up to the beautiful diversity in this world. Not only have the congregation of St Nicolas welcomed me to their services, they have also shared with me a bit of their vibrant culture. I find myself enjoying their parties, food, music etc (Whoever said Orthodoxy is dry and boring!) I have also picked up cultural sensitivities such as learning not to cross your legs (especially in church) for that is disrespectful.

Having said all this, I consider myself very privileged to be in this multi-national community. Most of all I am very grateful to have become an Orthodox Christian. I have “found the true faith” and “seen the true light” and started my long arduous journey of repentance. I have been blessed with seeing acts of piety in this community. This is probably the best gift I have received from St Nicholas, that of living the Christian faith.

From Timothy Tan



**A Homily**  
by St Nikolai Velimirovic

*Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning (Luke 12:35).*

This is the commandment of Him Who knows the weaknesses of our being, and Who desires our good more than our father and mother do. This is the commandment of our man-loving Lord. When man is ungirded, does not his entire body droop? When he girds himself, does not his entire body become as erect as a candle? As a candle stands, so must our soul stand erect before God. How will our souls stand erect before God if unrestrained physical earthly passions and lusts weigh them down? Behold in the loins is the nest of the main physical passions. To gird one’s loins means to tighten oneself with restraint and not to give in to passions at will. But to gird one’s physical loins is not the goal, but the means that we utilise to easily gird our mind, our heart and our will. Physical restraint is the primary school of our Christian character; after it comes a higher school, in which we learn restraint of the mind, restraint of the heart and restraint of the will. If we gird our mind, then lustful thoughts will be unable to find a place in its narrowness. If we gird our heart, then lustful desires will be unable to find a place in it. If we gird our will,

then the evil, beastly and demonic desires will be unable to find a place in it.

Brethren, only by a narrow path can one enter into the Kingdom of God. Only in the narrowness of the mind, the heart and the will, can the candles of the virtues be lighted, the flames of which rise toward God. By the image of the lighted candles, we should understand Christian virtues.

O Lord, pure and sinless, the seat of all virtues, help us to gird ourselves with restraint and to walk the narrow path to You with the lighted candles that You have brought in to the world.

To You be glory and praise forever. Amen.

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### **News from the West**

Greetings and a Happy New Year from all of us at S Anthony's in Perth.

The sixth year of our presence in Perth got away to a busy start with a visit from Metropolitan Paul who arrived on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> November and was met at the airport by Fr Ted and myself. We then took him to our home where members of the congregation had gathered for morning tea: we very much enjoyed this informal time with His Eminence as it gave us the opportunity to speak with him and ask questions as well as to hear of happenings in other parts of the Archdiocese. Ramzy Katan, Kanaan and Jamilee Haddad kindly provided meals, and, after Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning, the congregation sat down to lunch at "The Prophet" Lebanese Restaurant. Late in the afternoon Fr Ted drove His Eminence to the airport at Jandakot from whence he was flown to Bunbury in a light aircraft by Alex Karatamoglou.

On the journey by car back to Perth on Tuesday morning a brief visit was paid to the home of George and Mirella Raphael at Banjup, arriving at the University of W.A. in time for lunch with Professor Melville Jones who has a great interest in things Byzantine. Later in the day a visit was made to Parliament House where Metropolitan Paul was received by the President of the Legislative Council and welcomed to the afternoon sitting. In the evening there was a dinner with some of the Orthodox Clergy and several laymen. This busy visit ended at 8 am at the airport on Wednesday morning when the plane departed for Sydney. We really enjoyed the visit and felt much encouraged by the whole experience.

Christmas was very quiet - a number of people were away and that made a difference and now we are enjoying Theophany and the round of house blessings. We were invited again this year to the Blessing of the Vasilopita by the Greek Orthodox Bishop Nikandros along with the Ukranian Orthodox Priest and the newly-arrived Romanian Orthodox Priest. Now we approach S. Anthony's Day and we give thanks for the five years we have been going and the number of people who have come and gone and those who have stayed. An encouraging note on which to conclude is that Fr Ted has three young men who are coming to him for instruction in the Orthodox Faith. Praise God!

From Sue Doncaster.

### **And a Note from Bunbury**

Although Metropolitan Paul's time in Bunbury was short he was the recipient of a Civic Reception from the Mayor of the City at Monday lunchtime and in the afternoon managed a short round of golf when, much to his delight, he also saw his very first, real kangaroo. The Divine Liturgy was served that evening in the little Anglican church of S. Elizabeth of Hungary and as His Eminence had invited the Anglican Bishop of Bunbury, the Rt Rev'd David McCall, he was able to thank him personally for allowing our congregation the

continued use of this building for Sunday Liturgies. Gratitude is expressed to the Dorkham and Haydar families for their kind hospitality. Since July 2003 Bunbury has been granted Mission status by the Metropolitan and is under the Patronage of S. Helen next to the apostles. Please remember the faithful and me in your prayers.

From Fr Ted Doncaster.



Hall, Christopher A. (2002). *Learning Theology with the Church Father*. Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press. ISBN: 0-8308-2686-6

This book is the second in a three-part series, together with *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* and the yet to be published *Praying with the Church Fathers*.

Hall is a noted Evangelical scholar who, together with Thomas Oden, is leading a revival in the study of the Fathers among Protestants. In his preface, he emphasises the spirit in which the Fathers approached their theology: “For the fathers, as for at least one of the three great ecclesiastical communions of the Christian world -Eastern Orthodoxy-theology and spirituality, the Christian mind and heart, worship and reflection are an inseparable whole. The fathers remind us that theology is at best broken speech about the transcendent, mysterious God who draws near to us in the incarnation of the Son and the presence of the Spirit.” (p. 10). Hall goes on to add that for a while the Christian West has forgotten this spirit in its approach to theology: “We [Christians in the West] confess to doctrines profoundly mysterious by their nature ... We have mystery in plenty, yet our discourse averts it, avoids it as if in embarrassment. For mystery is what we have been taught through our education to extinguish.” (p. 10).

In this book, Hall presents the writings of one or more of the Fathers on each doctrinal subject. In a style familiar to Orthodox readers, he presents the process of articulating the doctrines of the Church as a response to the spread of heresy.

We begin with the Arian heresy. Arius taught that “the Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning.” (p. 36). St Athanasius replied with an image:

We see that the radiance of the sun is integral to it, and that the substance of the sun is not divided or diminished; but its substance is entire, and its radiance perfect and entire, and the radiance does not diminish the substance of the light, but is as it were a genuine offspring from it.” (p. 39)

On the question of the two natures of Christ, Hall describes the Nestorian position, which refused to accord to Mary the title “Theotokos”. Nestorius would only call her “Christotokos”. St Cyril of Alexandria took exception to this on two fronts:

1. That Nestorius, a bishop of the Church, should not “welcome the tradition of all the initiates throughout the world”, but “innovates as seems fit to him” (p. 89).
2. That Nestorius uses language which “simply cannot preserve the wonder and mystery of the incarnate Son.” (p. 89).

St Cyril’s response was in asserting: “He who Is, the One Who Exists, is necessarily born of the flesh, so that all that is born of the flesh, that is us corruptible and perishing beings, might rest in Him. In short, He took what was ours to be his very own so that we might have all that was his.” (p. 91) More reflections on the Trinity are presented from Ss. Basil, Gregory the Theologian, and Augustine.

Hall then moves to questions of the human condition and the role of Divine Grace. What did the Fathers teach about the way in which sin had affected human will? Two positions are presented, one by Irenaeus and another by Augustine. The first maintains that humans are endowed with a free will, and are called by God to grow in perfection. Even the first-formed man needed such growth, for he could not bear to see God’s glory in its fullness. This process of perfection requires the cooperation of our will with God’s free gift of Grace. Irenaeus affirms that “the prophets used to exhort men to do what was good, to act justly and to work righteousness ... *because it is in our power to do so.*” (pp. 124-125)

Sin is disobedience to God, and results in injury, but not in a total loss of goodness or the ability to choose the good. Instead of overwhelming us with divine glory, God has descended to our level and offered Himself to us as “a course of milk-nourishment”. Only in this way “could we be accustomed to eat and drink the word of God [and] to contain in ourselves

the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father.” (p. 127)

Augustine’s view, in contrast, was more pessimistic. He emphasised the insufficiency of human will. We have turned away from God, and, left to ourselves, we are incapable of willing the good. “The will commands itself to will ... yet what is commanded is not done. But actually the will does not will entirely. For as far as it wills, it commands. And as far as it does not will, the thing commanded is not done.” (p. 137)

Two chapters on divine providence follow. In them, we are treated to the writings of St John Chrysostom. Hall points out that Chrysostom did not write his work, “On Providence”, in a luxurious setting, but in exile. The saint predicates his reflections on his belief in the goodness of God and the freedom of man. What is important is not the calamity that befalls us, but what we make of it. All depends on our *disposition*. Difficult events “can be a correction even for those who do not pay attention to the Scriptures, *provided they are willing*.” (p. 163)

Our attention is drawn to the patriarch Abraham. He was commanded by God to sacrifice his son, and he obeyed. He saw the ordeal out to the end, and God provided relief and a lesson in faith. “Abraham’s willingness to respond obediently on the basis of limited knowledge actually expanded his understanding.” (p. 164)

With an inner disposition such as Abraham’s, the Christian can benefit even from death. The one who dies suffers no injustice, for he “will receive this same body pure and incorruptible”, whereas one close to him, who continues to live, “learns to act in a more level-headed fashion, is taught to think in a more spiritual manner, and (death) introduces into his mind the mother of all good, humility.” (pp. 165-166)

Yet our passions cloud our vision and our haste hinders our judgement. We possess “a curious mind preoccupied with vain questions, one that wants to understand all the causes of everything that comes to pass and to strive contentiously with the incomprehensible and ineffable providence of God” (p. 175). St John likens us to “people uninformed about the purification of metals”, who observe a goldsmith at work and rush to the judgement that “the artisan [is] destroying his gold by mixing it with ashes and chaff” (p. 180).

To our help comes the example of Joseph. Like Joseph, the genuine Christian who bridles one’s passions, refuses to judge by appearances and waits for the final outcome of events before passing judgement on God’s providence.” (p. 166)

Finally, the holy Father leaves us with this exhortation:



Knowing therefore that God is more tenderly loving than all physicians, do not inquire too curiously concerning His treatment nor demand an account of it from Him, but whether He is pleased to let us go free or whether He punishes, let us offer ourselves for either alike; for He seeks by means of each to lead us back to health, and to communion with Himself, and He knows our several needs, and what is expedient for each one, and how and in what manner we ought to be saved, and along what path He leads us. Let us then follow wherever he bids us, and let us not too carefully consider whether He commands us to go by a smooth and easy path, or by a difficult and rugged one.” (p. 181)

Chapters nine to eleven deal with questions that arose in the early Church concerning the authority of Scripture, the unity of the Church and the resurrection of the body. Concerning the latter, St Justin Martyr wrote the following apology, which reminds us of the wonder of God’s economy:

Now let us make this supposition: if you yourselves had not the form you now have, and were not born of parents like yours, and someone were to show you the human seed and the painted picture of a man, and were to affirm that from such a seed such a being could be produced, would you believe him before you saw the actual production? No one would dare deny [that you would not]. In like manner, because you have never witnessed a dead person rise again to life, you refuse to believe. We [Christians] have learned that it is better to believe what is impossible to our own nature and to men than, like other men, to be unbelievers, for we know that our Teacher, Jesus Christ, has said: “What is impossible with men, is possible with God.” (pp. 255-256)

In conclusion, this book will interest those who want to sample the writings of the Fathers on doctrinal issues. The style, with its extensive quotes, makes the reading particularly pleasant and uplifting. You can find the book at bookshops such as Koorong. I am on the lookout for the release of *Praying with the Church Fathers*.

By Ziad Baroudi

## Preparation for Great Lent

The first two Sundays of the Lenten Triodion are respectively known as the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee and the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. Traditionally, catechumens were baptised at Pascha and the gospel readings of these two Sundays are a preparation for a period of repentance in the lead up to baptism. The following are extracts from two contemporary Orthodox theologians, the late Fr Alexander Schmemmann, and Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas.

### **The Publican and the Pharisee**

*Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like the other men - extortioners, unjust adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:10-14)*

### **The Pharisee's lack of humility**

"Vainglory brings to nothing the riches of righteousness, but humility scatters a multitude of passions. Grant then that we may seek humility, O Saviour, and do thou bestow upon us the position of the Publican and cry out in compunction, "God be merciful unto us," that like him we may receive forgiveness" ( Canon for Matins, Ode 3)

### **The humility of the publican**

"the Publican was exalted by one thing, his humility, though he received no other testimony for anything else; so that you may learn not easily to despair concerning yourself." (St. Gregory Nazianzen, On Holy Baptism, Oration 40)

"the religious person still faces no greater danger than falling into the sin of self-righteousness, no greater pitfall than pride in carrying out one's religious duties."

"But what is humility? The answer to this question may seem a paradoxical one for it is rooted in a strange affirmation: *God Himself is humble!* ... In our human mentality we tend to oppose 'glory' and 'humility' - the latter being for us the indication of a flaw or

deficiency. .... How does one become humble? The answer for a Christian is simple: by contemplating Christ, the divine humility incarnate, the One in whom God has revealed once and for all His glory as humility and His humility as glory. 'Today', Christ said on the night of His ultimate self-humiliation, 'the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in Him.' "

## **The Prodigal Son**

### **Departure from the father's house**

*A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. (Luke 15:11-13)*

"The prodigal son, we are told, went to a far country and there spent all that he had. A far country! It is this unique definition of our human condition that we must assume and make ours as we begin our approach to God. A man who has never had that experience, be it only very briefly, who has never felt that he is exiled from God and from real life, will never understand what Christianity is all about. And the one who is perfectly 'at home' in this world and its life, who has never been wounded by the nostalgic desire for another Reality, will not understand what is repentance."

### **Coming to oneself**

*But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself ... (vv. 14 - 17).*

"Reaching the depths of emptiness, the son realises that apart from his father he has nothing. *He came to himself.* Here is the beginning of repentance."

*I will arise and go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (v 18)*

"*I will arise*, he says. *And he arose.* Those two declarations tell us that the level to which the son had descended was so low that his first step in carrying out his decision was to get up, lift himself from the mire, and turn his back on a life that had offered illusory

happiness and fulfillment."

### **The father's welcome**

*But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. (v. 20)*

"the Lord, who knows the depths of our hearts, on seeing that we seek to come to Him, does not walk, but runs to meet us. He clothes our spiritual nakedness, He seals our earnest desire to reunite with Him with a ring of true sonship; He prepares us to walk in accordance with the gospel (Eph 6:15); He gives us the nourishment we need."

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Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works.

If you see a poor man, take pity on him.

If you see a friend being honoured, do not envy him...

Let the hands fast, by being free of avarice.

Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin.

Let the eyes fast, by disciplining them not to glare  
at that which is sinful...

Let the ear fast ... by not listening to evil talk and gossip...

Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism.

For what good is it if we abstain from birds and

fishes, but bite and devour our brothers? *St John Chrysostom*

Fasting, neither above nor below your ability, will help you in your vigil.

One should not ponder divine matters on a full stomach, say the ascetics.

For the well-fed, even the most superficial secrets of the Trinity lie hidden.

Christ Himself set the example with His long fast; when He drove out the

devil He had fasted for forty days. Are we better than He? *Behold, angels*

*came and ministered to him* (Matthew 4:11). They are waiting to minister  
to you, too.

*Tito Colliander, Way of the Ascetics.*

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