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I CHOSE ORTHODOXY: A Spiritual Odyssey

In honour of the memory of the Archimandrite
THEOKTISTOS, Hegoumen of The Holy
Monastery of the Honourable Forerunner,
Dimitsana, Greece,
Vir integer sclerisque purus (Horace)

PREFACE

Pentecost 1993 was a watershed in my life... It would be truer to say that it signaled the beginning of an entirely new life for me; for on that day, in a monastery of the Holy Mountain of Athos I was baptised into the Orthodox Faith, thereby achieving something for which I had longed and prayed for many years. So the reader may find it odd that I have not known how to reply to my many kind Greek friends when they have asked me what motivated me to secede from the Roman church of which I had been a member for more than thirty years, and in which I had exercised various kinds of priestly ministry for well over two decades.

Sometimes I have answered by saying that my conversion was entirely attributable to God's grace. But then, what sincere conversion to the true (*i.e.* Orthodox) Faith is not influenced and inspired by that grace, which operates, not in some chemical vacuum, but always in, upon, and through the particular circumstances of a person's life? And what in effect my friends have wished to know were the particular circumstances of *my* life through the which God showed me his mercy.

Or I may have said that for many years prior to my formal conversion I had been aware that the Orthodox communities throughout the world, their unceasing and unseemly bickering about jurisdictional differences notwithstanding, together form the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" founded by Jesus Christ upon himself *alone*, and established in every part of the world, first by his Holy and All-glorious Apostles, then by their legitimate successors in "the Faith which was delivered once and for all to the saints" [*Jude 3*]. Yet neither is that answer, true though it is, as far as it goes, entirely satisfactory, simply because it does not go nearly far enough. For does not the Roman church, besides making an identical claim, also boast of being infallible and inerrant in matters of Faith and Morals (*i.e.* customs) by virtue of the fact that its principal hierarch, the Pope, has been endowed by Christ with the gift of infallibility. What never seems to have occurred to Roman catholic theologians and apologists is that papal infallibility, defined as an article of faith by the First Council of the Vatican (1869), banishes Christ from the "day-to-day" governing and presidency of the church. For what need can there possibly be for him to intervene in the affairs of the church if he has a viceroy, ambassador, minister plenipotentiary (call him what you will) who does the work for him?

Archimandrite Saint Justin Popovits persuasively argues that, by allowing the Pope to usurp the place that belongs to Christ in the government of the Church, Roman Catholicism has become just one more humanism.

But it was not reticence, still less reluctance, that impeded me from satisfying my friend's perfectly natural, and for me highly flattering, curiosity. It was, as I have already intimated, simply that I did not know *how* to satisfy it. How, I wondered, was I to discuss theological issues with persons who had received no formal training in theology? Or alert those whose immense privilege it is to have been born into an Orthodox ambience, of the perils of "ecumenism"?¹ Or alert them, the liturgical observances and traditions of whose Church have remained virtually unaltered since the fifth century A.D., of the sacrileges perpetrated by liturgical "reformers" (read *iconoclasts*) who, in a bid to make worship "meaningful", "relevant", to the spawn of the discotheque and "rave" era, have despoiled it of its eschatological, transcendent, sacramental, numinous, and proleptic elements (without which elements liturgy ceases to be liturgy), turning it instead into a strident "ego trip" in which everything must be done and said as quickly and in as slovenly a manner as possible?

Eventually, however, I came to see that by far the simplest, truest, and therefore best way for me to respond to my friends' enquiries was to tell them that I had become Orthodox because the Orthodox "system" (for want of a better term) was the only one which moved me to pray. A life without prayer lacks the dimension of eternity; it is as shallow and turbid as any wayside puddle, as superficial and fatuous as that seen in any soap opera, the *dramatis personae* of which drift aimlessly and seemingly compulsively from one crisis to another, mere pawns of some implacable, inexorable Fate, like, but without the elegance of, the protagonists of Greek tragedies. Yet no matter whether the Christian pray in complete physical isolation from his fellow believers, or when taking part with them in a liturgical ceremony, he never prays *alone*, but always as a constituent member of Christ's Body, the Church.

But what if he should find himself unable to pray in the manner approved of, and imposed by, the particular denomination to which he belongs? Then he is in very serious trouble. For, as Vladimir Lossky, one of the finest Orthodox theologians of modern times, was always at pains to stress, dogma (*i.e.* the truths of the Faith which are publicly proclaimed by the Church in her entirety) must never be divorced from piety (the incorporation of those truths, by each individual member of the Church, into his own spiritual life in such a way that they inform and transform his personal existence). If such a divorce should occur (as it has in western Christianity), theology becomes the pursuit of leisured academics of every shade of Christian persuasion – or of none – while for their part piety and devotion are merely the solace and refuge of devout, but psychologically flawed personalities. All this is expressed succinctly by one of Orthodoxy's great spiritual authorities, Saint Neilos the Ascetic: "If you pray", he says, "you are a theologian. And if you are a theologian, you pray." For indeed, who but he whose mind and heart are purified by prayer, fasting, and vigilance, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, may presume to say a word (*λογιον*) about God (*Θεος*)? Thus it is that twice each day (during the Doxology of Orthros [Lauds] and The After-Supper Office [Compline]), the Orthodox Church cites verse 10 of Psalm 35[36]: "For with thee is the well of life: and in thy Light (*viz.* the Holy Spirit) we shall see light." And for his part the renowned Athonite Elder Paisios (+1995), once said to a group of visiting students: "The theology which is taught as an academic discipline limits itself to historical issues. As it lacks the asceticism of the Fathers, it teems with ambiguities and uncertainties. No-one can understand the workings of God with his mind unless he first strive to live them in such a way as to bring God's grace to life within himself." For the whole purpose of the Christian life is to share in God's nature.² "God became man", wrote the Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, "so that man might become divine." "Christ became a bearer of the flesh", affirmed Saint John Damascene, "so that the flesh might become a carrier of the Spirit."

Knowing that I could not pray in the manner sanctioned by contemporary Roman Catholicism; knowing, too, that what I have called the Orthodox "system" was the only one in which I *could* pray, I felt obliged to become a part of that "system". But before giving an account of my deliberately and sinfully slow progress towards Orthodoxy, I feel it necessary to write something about my *present* understanding of it. And I stress the adjective, because, though based on more than thirty years study and experience of it, my understanding of Orthodoxy is still far from complete. Indeed, it can never be complete, either in this life or the next, for in Orthodoxy is revealed a Mystery which, though basic to the Faith, yet surpasses all human understanding: the Mystery of the holy, consubstantial, undivided, and lifegiving Trinity. And so in coming to Orthodoxy, we come "not unto the mount which might be touched ... but unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem"³, unto "the holy city" which Saint John "saw coming down from heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her Husband ... the tabernacle of God with men, (the tabernacle in which) he will dwell with (men)... and be with them and be their God."⁴

1. Ecumenism is as pernicious for today's Church as the Christological heresies were for the early Church. By impugning Christ's Person and Natures (and therefore his work), those heresies introduced divisions into the Church. Through doctrinal minimalism, syncretism, and indifferentism, ecumenism strives to unite all Christian denominations, regardless of their mutually exclusive and diametrically opposed doctrinal presuppositions, under some kind of New Age dome where

Suave Politeness, temp'ring Bigot Zeal,
Changeth "We Believe" to "One Doth Feel".

But no matter what his strategy and tactics may be at any given time, Satan's ultimate objective, the destruction of Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, remains unaltered.

2. Cf. II Peter 1:4.

3. Hebrews 12:18,21.

4. Apocalypse 21:2.

Chapter One: A PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Romans 12:2

It is an incontrovertible fact, acknowledged even by high-ranking ecclesiastics, that, with the solitary exception of aberrant and quite possibly satanic "pentecostalism", all western forms of Christianity are in terminal decline. If Church of England incumbents of what were formerly large, flourishing parishes, can muster fifty to a hundred parishioners on a Sunday, they think they are doing wonders; hence they have to resort to such extreme and sacrilegious measures as "raves in the naves" in a desperate attempt to attract people to them. And the Roman church is not doing much better. Attendance at Sunday Mass, once so essential a feature of Roman Catholicism, has declined over the past two decades by (for the Papists) an alarming twenty-five per cent - and it is continuing to decline, due, in part, but not entirely, to the recent scandalous disclosures of child sexual abuse by priests. And as for auricular confession to a priest, formerly an almost statutory duty for all Papists who wished to receive Holy Communion, that, along with much else that was always regarded as essential to Roman Catholicism, has simply fallen into oblivion. It has, in fact, been estimated that if the present trend continues (and there is no sign of it abating - quite the contrary!), by the year 2020 there will be more practising Muslims (many of them apostates from Christianity) than Anglicans in the United Kingdom!

It is customary to attribute this decline to the hedonist, materialist, multi-racial, multi-faith environment in which most of us have to live out our lives. But though I would not for a moment underestimate the baneful effects which such an environment has upon the practice and the propagation of Christian values, I do not believe such a state of affairs to be the sole cause of the moribund condition of contemporary western Christianity. If that were indeed so, how could the Gospel have taken root and spread in the first-century Roman Empire, every bit as hedonist, materialist, multi-racial, multi-faith as the society in which we live today? The underlying cause of the present state of affairs is, I submit, that the mainstream Christian churches (the Roman Catholic no less than the Protestant) are essentially nothing but organs of human convenience, owing their origin to their respective leaders' mistaken and misguided attempts to make Christianity conform to the norms of this world and the vagaries of modern society. "The Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God"¹ has had its rightful place usurped by "the gospel according to social activities". The *Zeitgeist* takes precedence over the Spirit of Truth everywhere present, filling all things. Hardly surprising, then, that all forms of asceticism, and the monastic life itself as it should be lived, and not as it is in fact lived in the few western monasteries that are still functioning as such, should be now regarded as obsolescent, anachronistic, and relegated to the lumber-rooms of ecclesiastical history as morbid hangovers from a benighted past. Nowadays it is of greater consequence to organise protests against this, that, or the other real, or imagined, social injustice, than it is to withdraw into the inner chamber of the heart, so as there to wage war through prayer, vigilance, and fasting on the demons that lurk within, tarnishing and distorting the image of God in which we are all created. Nowadays all that seems to matter is that we do something of a practical nature -and that we be seen doing it by others!²

"Emancipated, enlightened" Christians who espouse the causes of "gay lib", "women's lib", ecumenism, abortion, same-sex "marriages", euthanasia, and God knows what else, are ubiquitous and vociferous. In 1996 Sodomites and lesbians gathered from all over the United Kingdom in a Church of England cathedral in South London for a service of thanksgiving for their particular type of abnormality. And I think we may take it for granted that it will only be a matter of time before paedophiles are holding similar services of thanksgiving.

But though it is easy to criticise and pass judgement on contemporary western forms of Christianity, most of us - indeed, all of us except the saint - try to whittle down the demands of the Gospel so as to make them acceptable to ourselves, instead of endeavouring to measure up to them in order to attain to "the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ", as Saint Paul puts it.

Saint Matthew's Gospel tells of a rich young man of great moral probity who asked the Lord what he should do to inherit eternal life. He was told that he should keep the Commandments. That, he said, was something that he had always done. And so the Lord went on to say that if he was seeking perfection, he should dispose of all his worldly goods, give the proceeds of their disposal to the poor, and enlist as one of the Lord's closest followers. On hearing that, the young man's face fell. Rich though he was, he was unwilling to pay the price demanded of him for perfection. And so he went away sad. (And it should be noted that the Lord did not speak to him as he did because he was antagonistic towards him, but because he *loved* him.)

In the same Gospel we find two parables which illustrate the lengths to which some persons are prepared to go to achieve their purpose. One parable speaks of a merchant who, while on his travels, came across a pearl of great price. So desirous was he of owning that pearl that he sold all his possessions in order to purchase it. The other parable also speaks of a merchant, one who came across a treasure hidden in a field. And so eager was he to make that treasure his own that he put up for sale all that he had so as to be able to purchase at its face value the field in which it was from its unsuspecting owner. Hardly the sort of sharp practice and chicanery that the rich young man would have engaged in! But then, the Gospel is not a code of ethics: it is truly a way of life - the way of life of him who declared himself to be *the Way, the Truth, the Life*. It must be accepted on its own terms - absolute and uncompromising as these are - not adapted, diluted so as to suit the preconceived notions, veilities, and subjective interpretations of fallen human nature.

And Orthodoxy, being the Gospel in action, must likewise be accepted on its own absolute, unconditional terms. It demands our total allegiance, the which, if we are unable or unwilling to pledge, we shall, like the rich young man, turn away from it saddened and disillusioned. We must consequently relinquish our preconceived - and, as often as not, misconceived - notions about it.³ But, so as to relinquish them, we must be prepared to undergo a spiritual and intellectual catharsis which, like every catharsis, is a painful, though ultimately beneficial experience. One consequence of such a catharsis is that we shall see how partial and distorted our previous way of looking at Orthodoxy was. A church which makes no demands upon its members - as none of the western "churches" does -; a "church" which abandons, or at least sidesteps all forms of asceticism - as all western "churches" do -; a "church" which, so as to retain its present members, and possibly attract new ones, attenuates the terms of discipleship as these are laid down by the Lord himself; a "church" which attributes sin to psychological maladjustment or to social deprivation, thereby denying not the *fact* of evil, but the *mystery* of evil (and consequently, not the *fact* of the Cross, but the *redemptive power* of the Cross) - such a "church", like the forbidden fruit of which the first human couple greedily ate, may indeed seem delightful and desirable; but also like that fruit, it contains within itself the seeds of corruption and will eventually encompass its own downfall...

Perhaps this is the place to say something about those Anglican clergymen who resigned their ministry - not before receiving a generous golden handshake from the Church of England - in protest against the "ordination" of women to the "priesthood". It seems to many Orthodox Christians that those clergymen's commitment to Orthodoxy is less than wholehearted. Having been refused admission to Orthodoxy by the two principal Orthodox jurisdictions in the United Kingdom (Thyateira of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,

and Moscow) on the grounds that their reasons for seceding from the Church of England were inadequate, those disaffected clergy prevailed (without much difficulty) on the Patriarch of Antioch, His Beatitude Ignatius IV, to receive them under his *omophorion*. There is considerable irony in that; for the Patriarch of Antioch is the *only* high-ranking Orthodox hierarch to declare himself to be *personally, as a private individual*, in favour of the ordination of women!

I have already said that the two major Orthodox jurisdictions in Great Britain did not consider the case made by those clergymen for seceding from the Church of England so as to become Orthodox sufficient justification in itself for granting their request. And neither was it! In the first place, for many years past overseas branches of the Anglican Communion have allowed women to function as "priests". So were those clergymen so myopic that they did not feel the need to act till the big, bad wolf was baying on their own vicarage and rectory doorsteps? Secondly, never since its inception has there been a time when some prominent member of the Church of England or the Anglican Communion has not impugned or rejected some essential article of the Christian Faith. So why make such an unconscionable fuss about the "ordination" of women? Thirdly, the Church of England/Anglican Communion has never, at any time, had a clear, consistent doctrine of the nature of the Church; it has been, and still is, what Pausanius, in one of his Speeches, said of Julius Caesar: "Every woman's man, and every man's woman". So how can it be expected to have a clear, consistent teaching concerning the nature of what is of the very essence of the Church: the priesthood?

Symptomatic, too, of those clergymen's half-hearted acceptance of Orthodoxy is the fact that many of them on both sides of the Atlantic still cling to their former liturgical practices, purged though these be of their more heretical elements. They argue that Orthodoxy may be expressed in any way that is not itself heretical. And that, of course, is perfectly true. But the fact remains that only the four Orthodox Liturgies (the Liturgy of Saint James, the Liturgy of Saint Basil, the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts) have always remained untainted by heresy. Whenever I hear "Western Rite Orthodox", as they are styled, argue in favour of the retention of their former liturgical observances, I invariably and quite automatically think of Rachel, who, prior to her departure with Jacob her husband for a new life of freedom, secreted all her family idols into her trousseau!

In the *Preface* I stated that for many years before my formal reception into Orthodoxy I had been convinced that it was the only true, authentic form of the Christian Faith. Yet, like the rich young man, I was unwilling to pay the price asked of me for entering upon the way of perfection. In my case, the price asked was not the renunciation of my material assets (I had none), but the abandoning of my preconceived notions about the relationship between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. And I will bring this long and rather meandering chapter to a close sounding a note of caution to all Roman Catholics who are considering becoming Orthodox and who may think that all that will be required of them if they do will be a downgrading of the Pope. If it is some kind of Disneyland Orthodoxy that they are looking for, it would be far better for them to remain where they are, or to become High Anglicans, or even members of a thoroughly spurious body calling itself "The Celtic Orthodox Church" (which, is neither Celtic nor Orthodox, and which has been denounced in an Encyclical Letter by Archbishop Gregory of Thyateira and Great Britain). But if they are sincere in their desire to become Orthodox, then they have no alternative but to accept it, not on *their own* terms, but on *its own*. Only so will they experience for-themselves the immense and inconceivable joy of belonging to the Body of Christ which is his Church.

1. Mark 1:1.

2. It is the bounden duty of every Christian to do everything that lies within his power to alleviate the sufferings of his fellow men, irrespective of their race, colour, or religious beliefs (if any). But it is no less the bounden duty of every Christian to seek the Kingdom of God which, as the Lord tells us, lies within us.

3. One such common misconception is that the only question that keeps the Orthodox Church and the Roman

Communion apart is that of the *Filioque* (the procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father *and* the Son). Nothing could be farther from the truth. Not only is the doctrine of the twofold procession heretical in itself; the way in which it was imposed on the Church by the Pope is quite unacceptable to Orthodoxy. No bishop, no matter how exalted his rank, can tamper unilaterally with the Symbol of Faith (*i.e.* the Creed); yet that is precisely what the mediaeval Popes did by thus altering that Symbol. If any changes, any modifications to the Symbol should be necessary, they can only be effected by an Ecumenical Synod. A bishop must act *within* the Church, not *over* it, as the Popes of Rome claim to be able to do.

Chapter Two: TWO FEATURES OF ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY AND CULT

Come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker. *Psalms 94:6*

Let us stand in awe, let us stand aright. *Orthodox Liturgy*

Two essential characteristics of Orthodox worship, which make it quite unlike any forms of contemporary western Christian "cult" - are: 1) awe; 2) revelation through concealment. In his masterly work *Das Heilige* the eminent Lutheran theologian, Doctor Rudolf Otto, wrote of man's reaction when in the presence of the numinous which he called *mysterium tremendum, mysterium fascinans*. That is to say, a mystery which, though inspiring awe akin to dread, nevertheless attracts and fascinates. At its very lowest level that awe may be compared to the sensations a person experiences when in the presence of social and/or intellectual superiors; or even - and perhaps more accurately - to our fascination with tales of the supernatural.

Instances of such awe and fascination, of such "revelation through concealment", abound in Holy Scripture. Perhaps the best known Old Testament instances are to be found in *Exodus 3:2 ff; 19:2 ff; 33:18 ff* where we read of Moses' reaction to the phenomenon of the burning bush and to the theophanies vouchsafed him on Mount Sinai; *Isaiah 6:1 ff* which tells of the seer's reaction to the glory of the heavenly liturgy; and *Habakkuk 3:2* which relates the terror of the prophet on hearing God speak. Certain psalms also speak of nature's reaction to the presence of its Creator: "The earth shook and the heavens dropped at the presence of God"¹; "The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee, and were afraid: the depths also were troubled"²; "The hills melted like wax at the presence of God"³; "When Israel came out of Egypt ... the sea saw that and fled. Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like young sheep".⁴ Can such passages, and others similar to them, be dismissed, as a rationalistic approach to biblical exegesis would dismiss them, as mere poetical licence? Not necessarily. Purified by asceticism and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the eye of faith can perceive more than the rationalistic mind, darkened, warped, impaired, and prejudiced by sin, is able to discern.

Turning to the New Testament, we read in Saint Matthew's Gospel that, having completed their long, arduous, hazardous journey, the Magi did not burst in upon the Holy Family expecting to be offered refreshments and the most comfortable seats. No! "They fell down and worshipped"⁵, and only then did they open up their gifts and, presumably, enjoy the best hospitality that Mary and Joseph could provide. For his part, Saint Luke makes it clear that Peter's immediate reaction to the miraculous draught of fishes was not to rub his hands in gleeful expectation of what such a catch would fetch in the market later that morning. No! He "fell down at Jesus' knees saying: Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"⁶ And the synoptic evangelists relate, each in his own way, that the three disciples who were privileged to be eye-witnesses of the Lord's Transfiguration, "fell on their faces and were sore afraid." As well they might be. For, as Saint John Damascene tells us: what was transfigured "on the high mountain" was not the Lord's human body, but the disciples' visual organs, so that for a few fleeting seconds they might contemplate the glory which he had with the Father before the world began, shining through his human flesh... And as for inanimate nature's response to the presence of its incarnate Creator, all the Lord's miracles testify to that - as likewise did the darkness which came over the whole earth till the ninth hour at the time of the Crucifixion, when the sun, which for Joshua (in Greek, Jesus) the son of Nun, prolonged its shining, hid its light in grief at the death of Jesus, the Son of God.

If men do not feel awe in God's presence they no longer experience that presence, and go about looking for other objects of worship: film-stars, personalities from the world of sport, "gods" and "goddesses" of their own making, idols of their own imagination, which

titillate their curiosity and capture their enthusiasm till ousted and replaced by other "deities" no less ephemeral and insubstantial.

The second and no less essential characteristic of Orthodox spirituality and worship is concealment. Rooted in Scripture and the Fathers, Orthodoxy proclaims that God *reveals* himself to us by *concealing* himself from us. "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour... For thus saith the Lord...: I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth; I said not to the seed of Jacob: Seek ye me in vain."⁴ "Jacob awaked out of his sleep and said: Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."⁵

And what is the Christian Revelation if not the revelation of the God who revealed his divinity under the veil of his humanity? What did the shepherds, what did the Magi, what did the aged Receiver of God, Symeon see? What indeed did Mary and Joseph themselves see with their eyes of flesh, other than a Child whose outward appearance was essentially no different from that of any other child? Yet the shepherds rejoiced, the Magi fell down and worshipped, and Symeon, accustomed as he had been throughout his long life, to see hundreds of children presented each year in the Temple, declared the Child that he held in his arms to be the Light of Revelation for the gentiles and the glory of God's chosen people Israel.

The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel - which Prologue many biblical scholars believe to have had its own independent existence as a Christian hymn long before that Gospel was written - says: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we *beheld* his glory." And Saint John the Theologian (or one of his disciples), opens his First Epistle thus: "That which was from the beginning; that which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes; which we have *looked upon*, and our *hands* have *handled* of the Word of life (for the Life was *manifested*, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal Life which was with the Father, and was *manifested* unto us)..." Yet what did Jesus's associates hear, touch, see, and handle if not a Man who in outward appearance was no different from any of his contemporaries? Yet through that Man, outwardly so "ordinary", was revealed "that eternal life which was with the Father."

Because of the paradox of God's revealing himself through concealment there is absolutely no place in Orthodox mysticism for the baroque spirituality peddled by the Jesuits - a spirituality which gives prominence to the "composition of place", whereby, when meditating on some episode of the Lord's earthly life, we must, so to speak, "put ourselves in the picture" (smell the hay of the manger, hear the jeering of the crowds who lined the way to Golgotha, etc.). Orthodox spirituality is no more interested than Saint Paul was in "knowing Christ according to the flesh". If the individual events of the Lord's earthly life are to have any relevance for us, they must be considered "in the light of eternity" (*sub specie aeternitatis*), and our imaginations must be kept under strict control. "The imagination", says Saint Gregory the Theologian, "creates idols: only wonder can grasp something." And for his part, Saint Ignatius the Godbearer wrote in his *Epistle to the Magnesians* that we must strive to hear Christ's silence (ακουειν της ησυχιας αυτου).

1. Psalm 67: 8
2. Psalm 76: 16
3. Psalm 96: 5
4. Psalm 112: 1, 3, 4
5. Matthew 2: 11
6. Luke 5: 8
7. Isaiah 45: 15, 18, 19
8. Genesis 32: 13, 14

Chapter three: HEADS AND TAILS

Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are the reverse and the obverse of the same coin. At least that was what the nineteenth century erudite Slavophile Alexei Khomiakoff opined. When - now more than three decades ago - I first read his observation, I scornfully dismissed it as nothing but the distempered lucubration of a poor, benighted Russian. Now I think very differently. And my changed attitude has not been effected by any study or research on my part; it is due entirely to the alterations which have been introduced, and which are still being introduced into Roman Catholic theology and liturgical forms, since the late 60s of the last century, it is common knowledge that those changes have greatly distressed hundreds of thousands of loyal Papists the world over. Some of them, under the guidance and leadership of the late saintly archbishop Marcel Léfèbvre, have reacted to what they rightly regard as a "dumbing down" of Roman Catholic principles by forming themselves into what, judged from contemporary Roman Catholic standards, is a schismatic group, while many others have, albeit very sadly and with much suffering, acquiesced in and reluctantly "gone along" with what is happening in their church. They reason that if all these novelties and innovations are sanctioned by the Pope, they *must* be in order; for the Pope, by virtue of his alleged infallibility, could never do wrong, even though he should wish to - which, of course, he never would, as that in itself would be very wrong of him, wouldn't it?

The prerogative of infallibility was conferred upon the Pope by the First Council of the Vatican in the following terms:

The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when exercising the office of Pastor and Teacher of all Christians, he defines ... a doctrine concerning Faith and Morals (which doctrine is) to be held by the whole Church, through the divine assistance assured him in Saint Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church be endowed ... and therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church (*irreformabiles ex sese non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae*).

This definition of papal infallibility, which is an article of faith necessary for salvation for all Papists, in that it confers upon the Pope "that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church be endowed", clearly constitutes and establishes him as the very personification of the Church, herself, her very epitome. It also begs the following questions: If the Pope is indeed the Church personified, why was it necessary for Pope Pius IX to convene a council only so as to be told by its participants that he was indeed what he already knew himself, his predecessors, and his successors to be? But if the prerogative of infallibility was conferred upon the Roman Pontiff by the council, in virtue of what did it do so, since, according to the definition, the Pope's authority is ontologically greater than, and superior to, that which is and may be possessed either collectively or individually by lesser mortals than he?... Later in this same chapter I shall adduce evidence of just how "infallible" in matters of Faith and Morals certain Popes were.

The blame for the novelties and innovations in Roman Catholic theology and liturgy, to which I have already alluded, is usually laid squarely - but by no means fairly - at the door of the Second Council of the Vatican, and the fact that all the members of that council had, without exception, had traditional catholic doctrine drummed into them during their formative years, when preparing for the priesthood, is thus either overlooked or forgotten. For that council served only as a catalyst for far deeper and much older undercurrents emanating from two different but reciprocally complementary sources: *viz* mediaeval Scholasticism, and the pretensions of the papacy, which pretensions, developing and increasing both in number and size throughout the late Middle Ages, led to, and culminated in the doctrine of the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, as set forth in the First

According to the dialectics of Scholasticism, and its rationalistic approach to theology, every single mystery of the Faith must be subjected to a minute, quasi-microscopic scrutiny in order to ensure that it is quite compatible with human thought categories - a process which inevitably leads to and culminates in Bultmann's *demythologisation*. Thus, for instance, for Scholasticism it no longer sufficed to believe that, due to the action of the Holy Spirit, the eucharistic elements of bread and wine are changed into the All-Pure Body and Blood of Christ. That change had to be explained by the principle of *transubstantiation*, according to which, though the perceptible qualities ('accidents') of the bread and the wine remain unaltered, their inward being ('substance') is altered. Consequently, when the Aristoteleian notions of substance and accidents passed into oblivion, so too did the eucharistic mystery as this has always been and always will be accepted by the Orthodox Faith.

Ever since the rise of Scholasticism, western theology has ceased to draw its inspiration from "the hole of the pit whence it was dugged and the rock from which it was hewn",¹ viz Holy Tradition and the teaching of the God-bearing Fathers. Instead it has "hewed out empty cisterns"³ which are incapable of holding anything but the brackish water of German biblical "scholarship". Only what is German is germane. Thus for the Roman church, Scholasticism has been the equivalent of the Protestant principle of "private interpretation of the Scriptures". Neither the Roman approach to theology, nor its Protestant counterpart, being, as both of them are, entirely rational, speculative, subjective, and conditioned by the latest theological fad (whatever that may happen to be), concedes any importance or significance to Tradition. Moreover, the Protestant rejection of Papal infallibility is quite illogical, since Protestantism is itself guided and inspired by the opinions of whichever of its biblical exegetes may be currently in vogue. From both Roman Catholicism as well as from Protestantism Tradition is ousted: from Roman Catholicism, because the "infallible" pronouncements of the popes form the perfect and adequate expression of the Christian Faith; from Protestantism, because the sole arbiter in matters of biblical interpretation is the individual's conscience. For this very reason Khomiakoff quite rightly averred that the first protestant is the Pope. For Roman Catholicism, Tradition has become nothing but a superfluity, an anachronism; for Protestantism, it is merely superstition, old wives' tales. For Orthodoxy, however, Tradition is the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the Church - that same Spirit who will, according to the Lord's own assurance, guide the Church, her multiple errors, sins and blunders notwithstanding, into the whole truth, for no other reason than that she is the Body and the Bride of Christ.

The teachings of the Fathers, or rather, the *consensus* of their teachings (for not every single teaching of each individual Father may be considered an integral part of that *consensus*) is an essential element of Tradition; the relevance of the *consensus Patrum* for the right understanding of the Faith and for truly Christian living did not become more and more obsolescent - as most contemporary Papists, and all Protestants would claim that it did - with the demise of every single contributor to it and with the passing of time. The essence of the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church", her very existence, always have been, are, and always will be ratified and authenticated by her loyalty to what has been handed down (which is what the word "tradition" signifies) to and by her throughout the ages since the first Christian Pentecost, the day of her birth. For like her Founder, the Church was born in time; thanks to the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells within her, she grows in wisdom and stature, just as her Founder did during his earthly life; and like her Founder, she is *in* the world, but not *of* the world, her teachings being not simply *compatible* and *in accord* with those of his, but *identical to, essentially the same as his*. Indeed there is strict reciprocity and correspondence between the action of the Spirit in the first creation (that of the world), the birth of Christ, and the bringing into being of the

new creation, the Church, a creation far more wonderful than, ontologically different from, the creation of the material universe. For just as in the first creation (that of the world) the Spirit descended upon and *brooded over* (the meaning of the original Hebrew verb) the barren primaeval waters and chaos, thereby making them to teem with all manner of life, so too, by way of prelude to the new creation, that same Spirit came upon the lowly "handmaid of the Lord" in order to render her virgin womb capable of bearing him who is the Life of the World, its Saviour; and so also did he descend in the form of cloven tongues of fire upon a group of men who were living in fear for their lives, and turn them into pillars of the new creation which is the Church, harbingers of God's grace and goodwill toward men.

Just as mediaeval scholastic philosophy and theology adumbrated the private interpretation of Scripture, so is the doctrine of papal infallibility as defined by the First Council of the Vatican the counterpart of the Protestant principle of "only Faith, only Scripture" (*sola Fides, sola Scriptura*). Those who adhere to this principle are clearly unaware of, or choose to ignore, the fact that the Scriptures as they exist in their present Christian form - in other words, the Bible - were begotten by the Church, and not, as all forms of Protestantism postulate, *vice versa*. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (second century A.D.), acclaimed as the first *catholic* theologian, was at pains to stress: the Christian Church could exist, and for more than two centuries did in fact exist, without a canon of Scripture (the earliest Christian writings are the epistles penned by Saint Paul, at a conservative estimate, some fifteen to twenty or more years after the Lord's Ascension into heaven, and the question of which of the sacred Christian writings should, and which should not, be regarded as canonical was not settled for more than two centuries). Thus Protestant rantings about "The Good Book" find no place in Orthodox spirituality which regards *all* Scripture - that of the Old Testament no less than that of the New - as nothing more than written words about the living Word who, as Saint Paul puts it in his *Epistle to the Galatians*, "when the fullness of time had come (was) born of a woman, made under the Law", so as to "abolish in his flesh the Law of Commandments contained in ordinances ... so making peace by his Cross", as we read in *The Epistle to the Ephesians*. And so as to emphasise the inseparable bond which unites the written word of God (*i.e.* Scripture) and the Word of God-made-flesh who will remain with his Body the Church till the end of time, in all Orthodox churches the Book of the Gospels (Ευαγγελιον), sumptuously bound and encased in gold or silver adorned with enamels and precious stones, lies on the Holy Table (Altar) in front of the αρτοφοριον (tabernacle) containing his sacramental Body and Blood. No unauthorized person may enter the Sanctuary (Holy Place); no one who is not at least a deacon may pass in front of the Holy Table, and no woman may enter the Holy Place (the only exception to this being nuns in convents, whose services may be required by the serving priest). Orthodox Christians are horrified and scandalised by the disrespect that is now shown by Papists for the "sanctuaries" of their churches - they have been turned into play-areas for children to prance about in, and into which even pet animals are introduced (or find their own way uninvited). But all that is, of course, indicative of western "Christianity's" loss of a sense of, and reverence before, the numinous, the transcendent, the *mysterium tremendum*.

Earlier in this chapter it was seen that the prerogative of infallibility, conferred upon the Roman Pontiff by the First Council of the Vatican and defined in that council's Dogmatic Bull *Pastor aeternus et episcopus animarum nostrarum*, precludes ecclesiastical *consensus* as otiose. By virtue of that prerogative the pope - and only he - is able to determine, and pronounce upon, questions of Faith and Morals, and to define what must be believed by all true Christians, under pain of excommunication and eternal damnation. Thus in the Roman church there is a clear and essential distinction made between the "teaching church" (*ecclesia docens*) made up of, first the Roman Pontiff, then the bishops who are in communion with him and whose duty it is to ensure that his teachings and pronouncements are strictly adhered to by those entrusted to their care, and the "church

that is taught" (*ecclesia docta*), consisting of all lesser mortals: priests, deacons, monks, nuns, the laity... One Monsignor Talbot, an Oxford Movement convert to Roman Catholicism, who enjoyed a sinecure in the Vatican Secretariat of State till he had to be shut away in a madhouse for the remainder of his days, once wrote to an English Roman Catholic nobleman that it was not of the noble lord's competence to question the pope's motives for doing whatever the fit might take him to do to; his duty was, first of all, to give unwavering assent and unquestioning obedience to papal decisions, and then, secondly, to ride with the hounds (except in Lent, of course!) and attend to the due management of his lands both for his own welfare and that of his heirs.

Such a division of the Body and the Bride of Christ into the "teaching church" and the "church that is taught" is quite alien and utterly abhorrent to Orthodox ecclesiology, according to which *every member of the Church, be he Patriarch or illiterate peasant*, has the *ineluctable obligation, imposed by his Baptism and by his being a member of Christ's Body*, to preserve intact, and to hand on, "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints", as *The Epistle of Jude* puts it (and the significance of the plural [saints] should not elude us: the faith was delivered to *all* the members of Christ's Body, the Church - not just to one of its members, for him to pass on, in whatever manner it may suit him to do so, to those whose absolute allegiance he wrongfully claims). Certain councils (notably the so-called "Robber Council" of Ephesus and the reunion councils of Lyons and Ferrara-Florence) were at first regarded as "ecumenical" by the Orthodox hierarchy; but their repudiation by the laity subsequently proved them not to be so.

For Roman Catholicism the "proof text" for the dogma of papal infallibility is, of course, *Matthew 16:18, 19*. "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church ... whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." But if those words are essential for a true understanding of the role of the Roman pope, as Saint Peter's purported successor, in the life of the Church, as Papists claim that they are, one may be excused for wondering why the first evangelist, Saint Mark who, it is generally conceded, was writing at Saint Peter's dictation, omitted them from his gospel narrative. Surely not just so as to spare his employer's blushes... Orthodox theologians have always understood "this rock" upon which Christ would build his Church as either the substance of Peter's confession ("thou art the Christ...") or as referring to himself, this second alternative finding corroboration in what Saint Paul says about Christ being the *one, true cornerstone*. And indeed, many Roman Catholic commentators, both before and during the First Council of the Vatican, also favoured one or other of these exegeses. In fact if we turn to *Matthew 18:18* and to *John 20:23*, we shall see that identical powers to bind and to loose - powers which the Roman popes claim as their own, to the exclusion of every other bishop - are conferred by Christ on *all* his apostles. Thus, in his treatise *De unitate ecclesiae* Saint Cyprian of Carthage clearly states that, by virtue of his episcopal order and authority, *every canonical bishop* is endowed with the prerogatives mentioned in *Matthew 16:18, 19*.

The following instances, taken randomly from among many such, should suffice to show how preposterous the doctrine of papal infallibility really is...

1. In 202 Pope Zephyrinus gave the seal of his approval to the Patripassian heresy, according to which there is no real distinction between the Persons of the Trinity and that consequently God the Father suffered together with, or in the Person of his Son, as this heresy was propounded by Noetus of Smyrna.
2. Pope Callistus (Zephyrinus's successor) likewise sanctioned a variant form of the Patripassian heresy as it was propounded by Noetus's former pupil, Cleomenus, and by one Theodosius of Byzantium.
3. It is said that in 296, and during the ferocious persecution waged on Christians by

the Emperor Diocletian, Pope Marcellinus reneged on his faith and acknowledged the divinity of all the "gods" and "goddesses" of the Greek and Roman pantheons, even going so far as to burn incense in a pagan temple.

4. In 367 Pope Liberius put his signature to a treatise drawn up by the Arians (who denied the divinity of Christ), and at the same time condemned Saint Athanasius the Great, Patriarch of Alexandria who was in effect at that juncture, the *only* bishop to oppose Arianism and who thereby earned for himself the appellation "Athanasius against the world" (*Athanasius contra mundum*).
5. In 625 Pope Honorius I sanctioned Monothelitism (a heresy according to which there was only *one* will [the divine] in Christ). He was excommunicated for his pains.
6. In 1294 Boniface VIII, the pope apostrophised by Dante as "prince of the nine Pharisees" (popes whose elevation to the papacy had been simoniacal) declared there to be no essential difference between the human soul and that of brute animals. (So Darwin was not so original after all!)
7. Thirty-four years later Pope John XXII professed himself a fervent believer in the Chiliast heresy, according to which Christ would return *bodily* to earth and reign for 1000 years. (This "doctrine", in a slightly altered form, is held today by the satanically deluded "Jehovah's Witnesses".)
8. Pope John XXIII, subsequently denounced as an anti-pope (his name along with its numerical order was taken by the pope who convened and presided over the opening sessions of the Second Council of the Vatican), was condemned as an execrable heretic for denying the resurrection of the dead and for teaching that the human soul is mortal. Among his other infallibly moral improprieties were included simony, perjury, sorcery, sodomy, and fraud.
9. In 1438 the Council of Basle deposed Eugene IV for refusing to acknowledge its authority and that of other councils. According to Eugene, and to all the popes from the tenth century onwards, the Bishops of Rome, by virtue of their supremacy over all the Church, as successors of the Apostle Peter, are superior to any council. *L' Eglise, c'est Moi!*
10. In 1513 Pope Leo X was condemned for bringing the Faith into disrepute. (That particular "infallible Vicar of Christ" is on record as having said to his brother, as soon as he had been elevated to the papal dignity: "Since God has appointed us to the papacy, let us enjoy and live up to it; for everything now is a joke!" And on another occasion, addressing one of his cardinals, he remarked: "It is known to all what immense profits accrue to Us and Ours from the myth of Christ." Could Bultmann, or a recent Anglican bishop of Durham, have put it any better?)

Was all this, and much else of the same kind, unknown to the bishops who took part in the First Council of the Vatican? Indeed it was not! And the many bishops who argued against the definition of papal infallibility availed themselves of such data. But their dissent was stifled and overruled by the Ultramontanes (the bishops who favoured the definition), led as they were by the former Church of England Archdeacon of Chichester, Edward Manning, who was by then Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, ably aided and abetted by his "side-kick", Ramon Caixal y Estradé, Prince Bishop of the diocese of Seo de Urgel (an important part of which is the Principality of Andorra) in the Spanish Pyrenees. Manning could not get back to Westminster quick enough to pen a Pastoral Letter, to be declaimed from all the pulpits of his archdiocese, declaring the doctrine of the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff to be "the triumph of dogma over history"!!! (And that just about sums it up!)

The reader may be forgiven for wondering how it came about that, knowing all these facts - and many more facts of the same ilk - I could continue to be a member, and a priestly member to boot, of the Roman church. Reprehensible though I now know my conduct to have been, at the time I did not allow such considerations to weigh unduly upon my conscience, rather in the same way as today hundreds of thousands of Papists of all ranks of their church's hierarchy the world over pay only lip-service (if indeed they pay that much) to the dogma of papal infallibility and the pronouncements of the Roman Pontiffs on such matters as birth control, divorce, the "ordination" of women to the priesthood, abortion, homosexuality... My research into the matter had shown me clearly enough that it is quite impossible to reconcile papal infallibility with, and even more so to corroborate it by citing, the facts of history (Archbishop Manning's Pastoral Letter, to which I have alluded in the previous paragraph likewise gave oblique recognition to that fact). My research also showed me just how specious is the defence of papal infallibility made by those who argue that, though it is undeniably true that certain popes professed heretical doctrines, they did so *not in their capacity as popes, but as private individuals airing their own personal views*. If that were indeed the case, why should it have been necessary for councils to be convened so that such heretical doctrines might be looked into, and their exponents excommunicated and deposed? But manifestly wrong though I knew the dogma of papal infallibility to be in itself, I argued that it served as a useful safeguard against the doctrinal anarchy that reigns in the Anglican Communion and other Protestant bodies. Of course, I was forgetting, or choosing to overlook, the fact that a bad tree cannot yield good fruit and that the inerrancy of the Church is guaranteed not by purportedly infallible pronouncements by any one of her bishops, no matter how exalted his rank, but by the assistance of the Holy Spirit of Truth who is everywhere present, filling all things. But when I came to perceive that the Roman church was itself hastening with gigantic strides towards that same anarchy, the truth of Khomiakov's aphorism (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are the obverse and reverse of the same coin) - which I had contemptuously dismissed when I first came across it all those years ago - gradually dawned upon me. And the truth of that same aphorism is also borne out by the fact that practically all the changes and innovations which have been introduced into the Roman church's liturgical practices since the mid-60s of the last century are of a decidedly Protestant nature - so much so that, with only small and quite insignificant alterations made to it, the modern "liturgy" of the Roman church is currently used by many Protestant denominations.

In the Preface and these first three chapters my concern has been to give an account of the principal motives which led to my secession from the Roman church. The remaining chapters will form a chronological account of the meandering path that I took towards being received into the Orthodox Faith.

Chapter four: MY FIRST TASTE OF ORTODOXY

Many years ago, at a time when the liturgy of the Roman church was celebrated with great dignity and the style of church architecture was still clearly distinguishable from that of buildings on industrial estates or of rocket-launching pads, I decided to go to High Mass in Westminster Cathedral. I could, of course, have fulfilled my obligation to attend Mass in any one of the very many Roman Catholic churches which were far nearer to my flat; but I had read in a newspaper that the very fine choir of the cathedral would be rendering Haydn's *Nelsonmesse* on that particular Sunday.

On leaving the cathedral at the end of the performance I decided against returning home immediately. Instead, I would "hang around" till the "pubs" opened at midday: *Sortir de l'église, c'est entrer dans l'auberge...* And without my intending that it should - God seems to have had other plans for me - my "hanging around" took me to the porch of a Russian Orthodox church which has long-since been demolished in order to allow for extensions to a nearby coach-station. From within the church came the sounds of extremely good unaccompanied choral singing - every bit as good as that which had delighted me a little earlier in Westminster Cathedral. So, my curiosity getting the better of my fears about attending anything but Roman Catholic forms of worship (I was, after all, a recent convert to Popery), I entered the church so as to see whatever there was to be seen (and heard) inside. And naturally, what I both saw and heard without being aware of it was The Divine Liturgy of Our Father among the Saints, Saint John Chrysostom, served in a language (Old Slavonic) which at that time conveyed not the slightest meaning to me.

But that was not the only thing I saw. I also saw some members of the congregation attending devoutly to what was going on in the Holy Place and making frequent prostrations, while others again were ambling about lighting or extinguishing candles as the fit took them, and yet others were standing in the narthex, apparently exchanging with one another all the gossip of the previous week or telling of their plans for the week that had just begun. All that was in stark contrast to the quasi-military comportment of Roman Catholic congregations, whose members stood, sat, or knelt when everybody else did. Yet was it so very different after all? In those days, when Mass was still celebrated in Latin, it was far from unusual to see individual members of a congregation who lacked the benefits of a classical education (those from whom the poet Horace would certainly have kept himself aloof as being no better than a profane mob - *Odi profanum vulgus et arceo* -) flicking through the dog-eared pages of some manual of prayers (*The Garden of the Soul* and *Treasury of the Sacred Heart* were hot favourites), or, worse still, thumbing their rosaries, the beads which would jangle on the pew in front, to the distraction of all who were genuinely trying to give their undivided attention to the ceremonies that were being performed in the Sanctuary.

Yet despite the novelty of what I was witnessing in the Russian church, I felt instinctively, intuitively, that there, and in other places like it, I would find my true spiritual home. When, at the end of the Liturgy, the serving priest - who later became Metropolitan Antony of Surozh - came down from the Holy Place and greeted members of his congregation, I felt an almost irresistible urge to go up to him and ask him to receive me, after a proper catechesis, into the Orthodox Faith. That I did resist that urge was due to the most unworthy and shameful of motives: cowardice. What would my friends say when they got to hear of it? I knew - or thought I did - precisely what they would say: "First he's Anglican; then he's Roman Catholic; now he's Orthodox. Depend upon it, in six months' time he will either be peddling *Watchtower* (a publication of the pernicious Jehovah's Witness sect) on some street corner, or depositing his shoes outside the mosque in Woking (a small town some 35 miles south-west of London, where, at that time, was to be found the only mosque in the British Isles - and that was one too many).

And so, lacking the courage of my convictions, I went away sad, just as did the rich

young man whom we read of in the gospel. Like him, I was unwilling to pay the price (which in my case was the losing of face before my friends) asked of me for the attainment of spiritual fulfilment.

As this is quite a short chapter, I will spin it out with a parenthetical observation... Fear of what other persons will think or say about us is a favourite ploy used by Satan in his attempt to deflect us from doing what we know that God is demanding of us. It is a fear springing from pride and false self-respect which must perforce be overcome if we are sincere in our wish to do God's will. Nicodemus - he who came to Christ by night - was prey to that fear; so too have been Christians of every time and clime. Yet when each of us is arraigned before Christ's dread Assize (as we all surely will be), we shall have to answer for our *own* deeds, not for those of others. To put it another way: we should never be afraid of making fools of ourselves in the eyes of those who know us if we are certain that that will be the inevitable consequence of following Christ. If that little shyster, the publican Zacchaeus, had feared the ridicule of those whom he had swindled so as to line his own pockets, he would not have shinned up a sycamore tree and peered down through its branches (just like a monkey) at the Lord who was heading that way. And so he would not have had him as a guest, nor heard him say: "Today salvation is come to this house." If the Syro-Phoenician woman had not made a thorough nuisance of herself and almost pestered the life out of the Lord and his apostles, if she had taken umbrage at being called a little dog, her daughter would not have been healed. If the woman who had suffered from severe haemorrhaging for so many years had not flouted the rigid rules governing ritual purity - rules which prohibited all who suffered from any incurable issue to go out in public - , if, instead of hobbling out into the street, thereby incurring the censure of her neighbours,' just so that she might touch the hem of the Lord's tunic, then instead of being cured of her worsening illness, she would, sooner rather than later, have died of it. If the blind beggar had been daunted by the rebuffs of those who, wanting the Lord all to themselves, told him to shut up, he would not have been given his sight. If the harlot had not flouted the conventions of polite society by gate-crashing on what was, in effect, a private dinner-party, thereby outraging all the guests but one; if she had not kissed the Lord's most pure feet with her polluted lips, pouring upon them a costly ointment which, it is not unreasonable to suppose, she had purchased with some of her immoral earnings; if she had not drenched them with her tears and dried them with her seductive hair, she would not have heard the Lord say to his scandalised hosts: "Her sins, her many sins, are forgiven"; nor would she have departed for home at peace with God, her integrity restored. False self-esteem is, perhaps, the greatest hindrance to our spiritual growth, since it denotes a total lack of the basic virtue of humility.

Chapter five: EVASION AND SELF-DELUSION

The memory of my seemingly fortuitous encounter with Orthodoxy that Sunday morning when I was waiting to go for a tippie haunted me. Often I would return to that Russian church and to the one that replaced it in another part of London's West End after its demolition. And I also visited other Orthodox churches in London, some of which were no more than the converted ground floors of terraced houses. Yet in all of them without exception I experienced the same sense of awe, mystery, and transcendence as I had on the first occasion. And I found that fact both perplexing and worrying. For during the months that I was receiving instruction in the Roman Catholic faith it had been drummed into me that on no account was I to take part in heretical, or even "schismatic" forms of worship, Orthodox liturgical services falling into the latter category; true doctrine and worship, I was repeatedly told, was to be found only in the Roman church - and woe betide anyone to disregard that fact!

But, I wondered, was I not allowing myself to be swept off my feet by the novelty of it all? So as to ascertain whether or not that was so, I decided to visit other Eastern, but non-Chalcedonian churches in London. And what I witnessed in some of those churches made Orthodox forms of worship seem as sedate and lugubrious as what goes on in Calvinistic Methodist Meeting Houses. What, for example, could be more exotic than the serving priest throwing a red silk square into the air at the epiclesis, and catching it on his pate as it descended, so as (I was informed) to symbolise the descent of the Holy Spirit? Nothing, I wager! The ceremonies that I saw in those churches, beautiful in many respects though they were, could not compare with the Byzantine Liturgy, the majestic dignity, and restrained exuberance of which never fail to "come across" and impress, no matter how mean and humble the place in which it is being served may be.

Then when a young lady, niece of Igor Stravinsky whose noises were - and still are - as abhorrent to me as was at that time my admiration for his niece's feminine charms, spoke to me of a Belorussian Uniate church in the North of London, it seemed to me that I could have my cake and eat it: remain within the Roman Church and yet enjoy Byzantine liturgical worship. The Liturgy, as it was served in that small church, was indeed free of the "latinizations" which disfigure so much Uniate worship. That was not to be wondered at; for the priest in charge of the church had been trained in the *Russicum*, a college in Rome founded with the help of the Jesuits for the training of priests whose mission would be to hoodwink unsuspecting Russians that they would not have to renounce any of their liturgical traditions if they submitted to Rome. The priest in question was, like virtually all Uniate priests, "bi-ritual"; that is to say, a liturgical hermaphrodite who could serve either in the Byzantine or the Roman Rite as the fit took him. To such oddities can appropriately be applied Doctor Johnson's celebrated remark concerning women preaching sermons: "They are like dogs walking on their hind legs; they do not do it well, but the astonishing thing is that they do it at all."

I attended that Belorussian church for over three years, on the whole content with what it offered. I taught myself Old Slavonic, in which I became sufficiently proficient for the priest-in-charge to recruit me as one of his Readers. I took the Eastern (Byzantine) Church's canonical requirements fairly seriously - just how seriously depended on the extent to which any of them might encroach on my personal comfort and convenience (which only goes to show how superficial my understanding of, and commitment to, Byzantine spirituality were at that time). Thus, for instance, though vociferous in my denunciations of the infiltration into Byzantine worship of Latin forms of piety - the Nine First Fridays in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Five First Saturdays in honour of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the One Hundred and Fifty-Three Thursday Tea-Breaks in honour of the Miraculous Draught of Fishes, etc. - I would, before setting out each Sunday for the Liturgy, enjoy a hearty breakfast, being scrupulously careful to swallow the last

morsel of it three hours before receiving what I then regarded as The Pure Mysteries (a pre-Communion eucharistic fast of three hours' duration being mandatory for Papists in those days). From that fact alone it is clear that, in those days, my attraction to Byzantine spirituality and liturgical forms was principally - though by God's grace, as it has turned out, not exclusively - "cosmetic".

But with the passage of time, and in consequence of studying the matter from a theological, not a political, perspective, I began to question the whole concept of Uniatism. How could one devote oneself (to the extent that it suited one's convenience to do so, of course) to Orthodox spirituality which, as I have written in an earlier chapter, is essentially *apophatic* and yet at the same time belong to a church whose approach to theology and worship is, of its very nature, *cataphatic*? (And, be it said in parenthesis, it is precisely this *cataphatic*, "pragmatic", "epistemological" attitude towards the mysteries of the Christian revelation, that nowadays has driven large numbers of persons away from western forms of Christianity. Many of them have found spiritual fulfilment in Orthodoxy. But it also has to be said with immense sadness that there are likewise many poor deluded individuals who, suffering spiritual malnutrition in the "churches" to which they hitherto belonged, have turned, in good faith, certainly, but nonetheless to the eternal detriment of their immortal souls, to the demonic mysticism that is peddled and purveyed by non-Christian oriental religions, as well as to the occult, of which "spiritualism" is but a variant.) Uniatism, I concluded, was mere window-dressing; useful indeed as a flag for the pope to brandish in the faces of those who state that his church is merely a western institution, but in fact having as little significance for Orthodoxy as "high" Anglicanism has for Roman Catholicism.

When the Belorussian Uniate priest learnt of my misgivings concerning what he represented he was shocked and horrified. That, he averred, was what comes of flirting with "schismatics"; and he demanded of me an assurance that I would never again frequent Orthodox churches. When I replied that I could give him no such assurance, he told me that would no longer be welcome in his church. So, shaking the dust of London from off my feet I betook myself to Spain where, in the Jesuit-run University of Deusto, Bilbao, I had been offered the post of Lecturer in British Constitutional History

Chapter Six: IT IS SUGGESTED THAT I BECOME A PRIEST

During my four years in Bilbao the political atmosphere of the Spanish Basque Provinces became fraught with all manner of tensions due to the rise of the separatist/terrorist movement E.T.A. (acronym of the Basque *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* = Basque Homeland and Liberty), not a few of whose members were recruited from the clergy and students for the priesthood. Many such priests allowed the terrorists' weapons to be stored in their churches; for, according to the terms of the Concordat between the Vatican and General Franco's Fascist dictatorship, the police, if they wished to enter and search church property, had to apply to the diocesan bishop for permission to do so. That permission was, as far as I know, never withheld; but, while it was being obtained, the priests who were turning their churches - and even the tabernacles (αρτοφορια) of those churches - into arsenals, would get wind (possibly from some sympathiser in the diocesan curia) of what was afoot, and move everything (quite literally lock, stock, and barrel), to another location. And so the whole wearisome, Sisyphean process had to begin afresh...

Franco's Secret Police agents were ubiquitous - on public transport, eavesdropping on passengers' conversations, and in bars and restaurants where they might even prostitute themselves by acting as *agents provocateurs*. And priests who were considered to be in any way hostile, no matter how mildly, to *El Movimiento* (a euphemism for the Falange) would have their homes "bugged", their telephones "tapped", their sermons recorded on miniscule cassettes, as happened to me, some six years after my departure from Bilbao, when I was serving as a priest in Salamanca. (I - and presumably other priests too - also had "bogus penitents"; that is to say, persons who, while "confessing" their sins, would suddenly launch into a vitriolic denunciation of Franco's enormities, simply so as to ascertain how I might react, and, according to what my reaction was, either approve of me, or denounce me to the Secret Police - of which they were almost certainly members anyway - knowing full well that bound as I was by the secrecy of the confession, I could seek no redress, whatever they might say about me. But it did not seem to dawn on any of them that I would have been "as thick as two short planks" not to see through their duplicity.)

My work in the university also became increasingly difficult. The vast majority of my students were good, kindly young persons (not much younger than I was), and many of them became personal friends of mine. But how could they, born and bred as they had been in a one-party, police state dictatorship, appreciate the niceties of parliamentary democracy, the complexities of which elude even British persons and their elected representatives, judging from the way these behave at times? And in the University of Deusto there were, as at that time there were in all Spanish institutions of higher learning, students who were the minions of the Secret Police, their duty being to report back to their masters anything that might be (according to their criteria) construed as detrimental to *El Movimiento*.

I was not spared the attention of such stool-pigeons. During one of my weekly Questions and Answer times (a poor substitute for the tutorial system which obtains in Britain's older and better universities) one of them put to me a question concerning the role of the British monarch as Head of State. Though seemingly innocent, his question was instinct with malice, and concerned a matter that I had already dealt with in an earlier lecture. I replied by asking my student why, if he wished to nit-pick, he did not start with a Head of State who was much nearer his own front door.

That did it! Within minutes of my leaving the lecture-hall the Dean of the Faculty summoned me to his office and asked me why I had presumed to criticise *El Caudillo*. Striking an attitude of utter incomprehension and aggrieved innocence, I assured the Dean that *El Caudillo's* name had not passed my lips the whole time that I was in the lecture-hall;

and to prove it I repeated what I had said to the student. "Well", the Dean rejoined, "you may not have mentioned Franco by name, but it is clear that you were alluding to him." "If you and the student to whom I addressed the remark so obviously feel that it is cap that fits Franco (for why else would you assume that I had meant him?), then you should let him wear it", came my answer. And seeing that the incident had provided me with a God-sent opportunity to make my escape without loss of face from the university and, indeed, from the Basque region of Spain, where E.T.A. terrorist attacks were fast becoming an almost daily occurrence, I added, "As you appear to be dissatisfied with my professional skill, I have no alternative but to tender my resignation." I did so, and successfully applied for a post with the British Council in Madrid.

On my arrival in Madrid I immediately made it my business to ascertain whether or not there were any Orthodox and/or Uniate churches in that city, and having been apprised that there was one of each kind, the following Sunday I paid the first of very frequent visits to the Orthodox church which occupied the ground-floor of an Edwardian-style detached house opposite one of Madrid's two principal bull-rings. Everything about that little church delighted me. First there was the Orthodox liturgy, of which I had been deprived during my time in Bilbao. But then, members of the community themselves fascinated me. There I renewed my acquaintance with His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Vladimir Kyrillovich, heir to the Russian Imperial Throne, whom I had first met a few years earlier on an inauspicious occasion in London at the onomastic celebrations of a Russian lady among whose other delusions of grandeur and eccentricities was her claim to be the reincarnation of Catherine the Great. (So pro-Nazi were her sympathies, of which she made no secret, [Hitler's only mistake being that he had failed to exterminate *all* the Jews!!!] that she was interned for the duration of the war in a women's prison where she used her chamber-pot to distil vodka from potato-peelings gleaned from the prison's kitchen. A truly resourceful lady!) I also came to know the ex-King Symeon (now the President) of Bulgaria - he and I are exactly the same age, and being privileged to enjoy his hospitality on more than one occasion, I was deeply impressed by his sincere Christianity and profound spirituality rooted in and inspired by Orthodox ascetical teaching and practice. And in the same church I was also introduced to a Serbian countess whose beauty in her youth was, she took pains to assure anyone with the time and inclination to listen to her, nothing short of devastating. So much so that on one occasion she had to flee the unsolicited and unwelcome amorous advances of some Arab prince or other, by dint of travelling under cover of a sand-storm over a desert (the name of which I never did succeed in learning) in a sledge drawn by - of all things - a camel! Or so she said... The priest-in-charge of that church was a thoroughly bad-tempered old Bulgarian who was not above boxing his server's ears even for the most trivial slip. Yet the lad did not seem to mind; he was there Sunday after Sunday, smiling and cheerfully resigned to be cuffed yet again. I later learnt that he was ex-King (President) Symeon's eldest son who is now a monk in a monastery of what was once (and I trust will again be) his father's kingdom... So much for my Orthodox experiences in Madrid!

By contrast the atmosphere of the Uniate chapel was not nearly so colourful; though I did attend there the wedding of a girl who claimed to be descended from the Paleologues, to an African tribal chief who was as black as the ace of spades. The chapel had been founded in the basement of the main Jesuit church in Madrid by one Father Morillo, a Jesuit who had worked as a Uniate priest in the Ukraine prior to that country's annexation to Russia. Like the pious Aeneas, before he founded his city (*dum conderet urbem*), Father Morillo had had to overcome severe opposition so as to establish his chapel. Most of the opposition came from the laity, highly suspicious of a priest who did not celebrate Mass in the same way as every self-respecting priest should. Might he not be a crypto-Protestant? That would not have surprised them. Nothing, it was well-known, was too perfidious for the Jesuits just so long as they deemed it "For the Greater Glory of God" (*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*). For had they not connived at, if not positively colluded in, the assassination of Henri IV of France - he who thought that a Mass was an insignificant price

to pay for Paris (*Paris vaut bien une messe*) though doubtless he would have thought differently and remained a Protestant if he had known what price for it would in the end be demanded of him? Had they not dressed up as mandarins in a vain attempt to prove to the Emperor of China that his conversion to Popery need not entail any change of accoutrement or sartorial expenditure? Had they not hidden themselves behind the screen in Catherine the Great's boudoir so as to eavesdrop on, and report back to their General in Rome, all her dalliance with the military attaché of the French legation? Had they not lopped off the fingers and toes, one by one, of a young Aleut martyr, Peter; in a perfectly futile attempt to make him forswear Orthodoxy, to which he had but recently converted from paganism? Of course they had! Everyone knew that! So better by far to give the Jesuits a very wide berth. Children whose route to and from school took them past that chapel were bidden by their anxious parents and solicitous teachers to make the sign of the cross and run like hell as they approached it, lest some perfectly frightful thing should suddenly rise from out the bowels of the earth and spirit them away, only it knew whither, never to be seen or heard of again.

When I first became acquainted with that Uniate chapel it still was owned by the Jesuits, but it was administered and served by a priest from the northern Spanish diocese of Oviedo. He was a very good person and soon became my most trusted friend in Spain. One day he took me completely by surprise by proposing that I become a purely Byzantine-rite priest (that is to say, no bi-ritualism, no liturgical transvestism). I told him that as such a notion had never entered my head till then, I would need time to pray and reflect upon it. The upshot was that, some four or five weeks later, I and my new-found friend were received by the Archbishop of Madrid who agreed to accept me for ordination to the priesthood according to the terms stipulated by my friend who pointed out to the archbishop that he badly needed someone who would assist him in his apostolate.

Chapter Seven: ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

I began my theological studies at a time when "the bark of Peter" (an epithet frequently used by Papists when speaking of their church) was beginning to be pitched and tossed by the billows of the Second Council of the Vatican.

My studies began in the University of Salamanca, continued in *L'Institut Catholique de Paris*, and formally terminated in the University of Louvain. And in each of those three centres, the same sad story was repeated with only minor variations: Tradition was either spurned or neglected altogether, its rightful place having been usurped by modernistic, rationalistic ideas adopted mainly from German liberal Protestantism. In fact the only real difference apart from the obvious linguistic and topographical ones between Salamanca, Paris, and Louvain was that the views being aired in Spain were considered "old hat" in the other two schools, where they had been voiced two or three years earlier. The time-honoured "landmark set by the Fathers"¹ had been removed so as to make way for the Bultmanns, the Conzelmanns, the Schlierachers, the Feuerbachs, and the use of Hegelian dialectic as an aid to biblical exegesis; we were "ever learning without coming to a knowledge of the truth."² Even that champion of traditional western theology, Thomas Aquinas, was deposed from the throne from which he had reigned, at least since the pontificate of Leo XIII, as supreme and undisputed arbiter of doctrine for all Roman Catholic seminarians and theological students. And if anyone had the temerity to ask why the Fathers were no more cited, except in an optional subject called Patristics, he would be told that it was because they were no longer relevant for today's church; their theology, now assigned to an ecclesiastical limbo, had been superseded by such novelties as the so-called "theology of revolution" and "theology of social change" (read anarchy). Mantras like "the church in revolution and revolution in the church" (it was a time of serious civil unrest in France and elsewhere), and "the testimony of poverty" were being mouthed everywhere. But all that far surpassed my very limited intellectual capacity and endowments. For, I asked myself, if we were supposed to accept poverty as a Christian testimony - which it *is* when undertaken for ascetical motives - why were so many of its advocates willing to jump onto the band-wagon and deprecate it in a seemingly endless spate of articles and diatribes? The answer seemed clear to me: they found it both profitable and lucrative to do so. But then, as even my parents used to say: there is a nasty, cynical streak in me... And for their part nuns in vast numbers evinced their steadfast fidelity to their vow of poverty by discarding their religious garb in favour of fashionable dresses and costly coiffures. Not that it did them any good; all they achieved thereby was to make themselves look quite *dreadful* frights.

Nor was it only in the field of Systematic (Dogmatic) Theology that modernism was rife; Ethics (Moral Theology) was likewise adversely affected by it... It was claimed that there was no such thing as an objective moral norm, the morality or immorality of any act being predetermined by the psychological development and social background of its perpetrator. That, we were told, was "The New Morality", which an intellect as limited, jejune, and underdeveloped as I have just said that mine was, experienced the utmost difficulty in differentiating from the old immorality, (To deny the existence of an objective moral code is to deny the Lord's divinity. For if indeed there be no such code, on what grounds could he denounce adultery, child abuse, the wrongful exploitation of the weak and vulnerable, religious hypocrisy, and a host of other evils? To deny the existence of an objective moral code is to deny not the *fact* of evil, but the *power* of evil; and that results in a denial, not of the *fact* of Christ's Crucifixion, but the *power* of his Crucifixion.)

The modernistic, rationalistic venom that was being injected into me in Salamanca and Paris was adversely affecting my spiritual life. Daily I witnessed the tragi-comedy of professors, all of whom were priests, posturing and pirouetting in an attempt to reconcile their new-fangled notions with traditional catholic teaching. They were as dishonest with themselves as they were with their students; and it was perfectly clear that they had lost

whatever faith they might once have had. Yet what else could they do? They had to gain a living somehow; and since to dig they were unable, to beg they were ashamed...

But their dishonesty had the effect of causing me to doubt certain basic Christian truths which I had firmly believed even as an Anglican. While in Paris I could rid my mind of the baneful effects of what I was hearing in lectures by attending Vigils each Saturday in one or other of the Russian churches of which that city boasted. And on Sunday mornings, after attending Mass in a church where I knew everything would be over and done with in about half-an-hour, I would make my way to the Greek cathedral which is near the Eiffel Tower. But in Louvain things were not so easy. At the time I am writing of there was no Orthodox church in that beautiful old Flemish university city (whether or not there is one there now, I do not know). So if I wished to attend an Orthodox liturgy - something upon which, as I knew from experience, my equanimity for the coming week depended - I had no alternative but to travel by train either to Antwerp or to Brussels. And again, the stark contrast between Roman Catholic "worship", and the worship of the Orthodox Church was vividly brought home to me one Sunday morning when, fearing that I might miss the mid-day train from Brussels back to Louvain, I asked the priest when the Liturgy would end. "It continues for ever - in time and in eternity!", came his uncompromising reply - one which I shall never forget.

While in Belgium I paid occasional visits to the Benedictine bi-ritual priory of The Holy Cross in Chevetogne. But though I was always received with the utmost kindness by the monks I never felt truly at ease there. The priory has two churches: the one of the Latin-, the other of the Byzantine-rite and the monks may opt to serve in whichever of the two they prefer. I, of course, was interested only in the Byzantine church, where the liturgical offices were served with such a degree of perfection and attention to detail - in rather the same way as the Roman liturgy is performed in "high" Anglican churches - that it became immediately apparent that the monks were not Orthodox, whatever else they might be. Orthodoxy was something about which they all knew so much, but of which, with very few exceptions, they understood so little. And those exceptions, perceiving that they were living in an ecclesiastical Disneyland, have, over the years, converted to Orthodoxy, some of them even being raised to the episcopacy.

I will bring this chapter to a close with yet another digression. In an earlier chapter I stated a well-known fact: Christianity in its western guise is moribund, the truly Christian ethos having been replaced by gross pragmatism. Thus, to give but one example, in the Roman church no less than its Protestant derivatives, prayer and fasting (without which, the Lord assures us, certain types of evil cannot be vanquished) are considered superfluous, anachronistic - a conviction which I heard repeated over and over by priests and students during my years of preparation for ordination. And that conviction results in an enervated form of Christianity which overestimates and exaggerates communal activity, to the detriment of all forms of ascetical endeavour. And what is true of western Christianity in general is also true of contemporary western monasticism, with but very few exceptions which only serve to prove the rule. Western monasteries (those for women no less than those for men) have come to resemble country clubs, whose members may enjoy all the comforts of modern society including yearly and sometimes twice-yearly holidays, "days off" when the members can go wherever they like and do whatever they are minded to, television, tennis courts, indoor and outdoor heated swimming-pools... is it to be wondered at that so many such monasteries have, in recent decades, been forced to close down? What man or woman who is sincerely intent on finding the true monastic ideal would, for one second, suppose that it could be attained in such institutions, the very amenities of which only serve to exacerbate the few remaining restrictions which they *do* still impose on their members? What "went (the members of such "monasteries") out into the desert for to see?" Television, it would seem. What possible equation can there be between the "spitting image" monks and nuns - the few that there still are - of contemporary Roman Catholicism and the men and women "dwelling in deserts and

mountains and in dens and caves of the earth; of whom the world is not worthy"³ - men and women who have heeded the call: "Come out... and be ye separate. Touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and be to you Father; and ye shall be my sons and daughters"?"⁴

Undoubtedly one motive which induced the Roman church to renounce the monastic ideal was its desire to conciliate Protestants and to placate their hatred of monasticism which they have always seen as a form of morbid self-indulgence and escapism. Instead of withdrawing to monastic seclusion, men and women should, according to the Protestant mind, be out and about in the world *doing* things of a practical nature for their fellow human-beings. But in arguing thus, are not Protestants repudiating one of their most basic tenets: the superfluity for salvation of what Article XIV of the Thirty-Nine Articles calls "works of supererogation" and of good works in general, forsooth? The true monk seeks to fulfil his vocation to be a partaker of the divine nature (θεωσις) first by καθαρσις, that is to say by cleansing and ridding himself of his disordered passions and unruly instincts through the practice of the virtues, then by striving for the gifts of vigilance and unceasing prayer - none of which he is able to achieve except through stillness (ησυχια), and withdrawal and reclusion from the turmoil of the world. Monasticism and "the temporal commitment" (another mantra that was bandied about after the Second Council of the Vatican) are mutually incompatible and irreconcilable. The true monk will evince his love and sympathy for, his personal identification with the poor and the oppressed not by setting up soup-kitchens and taking part in protest rallies, but by his renunciation of material possessions, wealth, and worldly comforts (no matter how legitimate and innocent in themselves these may be); he will voluntarily espouse poverty, deprivation, and all that the world sets store by, seeking thereby to acquire the "mind which was also in Christ Jesus ... who, being in the form of God, ... emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant ... (and) humbled himself, becoming obedient ... unto the death of the Cross."⁵ Monastics of the western church, besotted as *most* (but not quite *a//*) of them are by the novel and heretical practices introduced into it in recent decades, no longer look unto the rock whence they were hewn, nor to the pit whence they were dug.⁶ "They have forsaken ... the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns"⁷ that can hold nothing but the murky water of "the temporal commitment" as this is set forth in the documents of the Second Council of the Vatican. In short: they in company with their counterparts, the "secular" (diocesan) clergy, have turned themselves into nothing but celibate social-workers.

1. See Proverbs 22:28; 23:10.

2. II Timothy 3:6.

3. Hebrews 11:37.

4. II Corinthians 6:17.

5. Philippians 2; 6ff.

6. See Isaiah 51:1.

7. Jeremiah 2:13b.

Chapter Eight:

WORKING AS A PRIEST IN SPAIN AND GREAT BRITAIN (1)

About six months before I was due to be ordained to the priesthood the Archbishop of Madrid who had accepted me, and into whose archdiocese I was incardinated (*i.e.* canonically registered as one of its clerics) died. His successor lost no time in telling me that I would not be ordained as a Byzantine-rite priest. I could not appeal against his decision for the demise of a bishop or monastic head automatically abrogates all the decisions that he took during his reign (though they may be reactivated if his successor sees fit to do so).

The new Archbishop of Madrid did, however, offer me the post of Warden of *El Centro Ecu­mé­nico Juan XXIII* in Madrid - an offer which I accepted with alacrity as it would make available to me Orthodox publications and learned reviews which, for pecuniary reasons, would otherwise have been quite inaccessible to me. At almost the same time as I took up my duties as Warden, I was offered another post: that of Reader in Byzantine Theology at the Faculty of Theology of Madrid.

In each of my official capacities (Warden and Reader) I was invited to attend Orthodox conferences and *symposia* in different European countries. (At first I experienced some difficulty in obtaining my archbishop's permission to travel to countries of the former Soviet Block because at that time it was forbidden for Spanish nationals to visit the Soviet Union. But then, as I was not slow to point out: my nationality was *British*, not *Spanish*. And besides, I reminded him of something that he appeared to have forgotten - for it was inconceivable that he never was told it! - the *Magna Charta* clearly laid down that the English church - and for that matter, the Welsh one too! - must be free [*Ecclesia anglicana libera sit*] So there!!!)

From each conference and *symposium* I returned to Madrid elated by my experiences. Elated, yes! But also more and more dissatisfied with the state of the Roman church which, far from repenting of, and seeking to redress its errors, seemed hell-bent on thrusting itself over the precipice of chaos and self-destruction. One Spanish friend, to whom my views were known, asked why I did not there and then act upon the courage of my convictions. I was, he quite rightly said, like a dog howling with discomfort because it is sitting on a nail, and yet too indolent to get up and move away. Yet another friend asked me how much longer I would go on behaving like Balaam. And in my heart of hearts I knew full well that what I was resisting was not so much asinine recalcitrance¹, as the continual promptings of the Holy Spirit.

So when the committee of the Faculty of Theology embarked on a course of retrenchment, and abolished the Readership in Byzantine Theology, transferring its discipline to the Chair of Systematic Theology, I decided to return to Great Britain from which I had been absent for almost fourteen years. And after accustoming myself once again to life in what would undoubtedly at first seem in many respects a foreign land, I would seek reception into Orthodoxy. Or such were my intentions at the time...

At first it seemed to me that the Roman church was in a much healthier state in Britain than it was elsewhere. But first impressions, it is well known, can be and often are deceptive... Though perhaps not so stridently as in continental Europe, modernism was, I soon discovered, alive and well here. And indeed, how could it not be? For modernism is not a local phenomenon, but something inherent to the very nature of Roman Catholicism notwithstanding, papal pronouncements to the contrary; it is a necessary consequence of the Bishop of Rome's claim to political power as head of a secular state. Long before his expulsion from the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) and excommunication by Rome, George Tyrrell had declared that if the Roman church so much as grazed the tip of one of its little fingers, it would, slowly but inexorably, bleed to death. Well, over the past forty years the Roman church has done, considerably more than graze the tip of a little finger, it has been busily engaged in slitting its own throat from ear to ear! Technically the Roman pope is still the infallible head of his church; but no one takes the slightest notice of what he says if they don't feel like it. Suffice it for him to declare, one thing, for everyone else to say quite

the contrary! (To counterbalance the pope's purported "infallibility", a synod of bishops from all over the world is now intermittently convened in Rome, its remit being to counsel the pope as to what his attitude towards contemporary issues which affect or concern the church should be; but he has not the slightest obligation to heed, still less to implement, representations made to him by that synod - or indeed, from any other source for that matter. Surely Beau Nash would not have baulked at such merely fictional curtailments of his absolute rule over the proprieties to be observed in the Pump Room at Bath...)

I, like most priests who work outside their own dioceses (that is to say, the dioceses into which they are incardinated), was assigned to parishes to which because of the difficulties in them (difficulties originating mainly from the conditions obtaining in the presbyteries [houses in which all the priests of any one parish live together]) the bishop would not have appointed any of his own canonical subjects. Thus I was sent successively to work with two priests who were chronic dipsomaniacs. "Not only was I expected to "cover up" for them in front of the parishioners, who were, for all my dissimulations, perfectly cognizant of what was going on: I had also to perform for them duties which were properly theirs, but which their grievous affliction rendered them incapable of discharging. Or again, the former, and now deceased bishop of a diocese in the South of England, knowing full well that because of poor eyesight I did not hold a driving licence, nevertheless appointed me to a parish on the outskirts of which were two large hospitals and to both of which he named me Roman Catholic chaplain. Thus, if I were called out to either hospital (as usually happened two or three times a week) late at night or the early hours of the morning to minister to a dying patient, I had perforce to walk the four mile round journey from the presbytery to the hospital, as no public transport ran after 11.00 p.m. and it was quite impossible to find any taxi at such late hours. Consequently, more often than not, by the time I reached the hospital the person to whom I had been summoned would have died. (There were, I should point out, two other priests in that presbytery, both of them with motor-cars; but they were unable to respond to such emergencies either because they would not yet have returned from a carouse in the nearby Irish Club, or the house of some compatriot of theirs; or because, if they *had* returned, they would be sleeping off the effects of their ethylic junketing.)

Chapter Nine:

WORKING AS A PRIEST IN SPAIN AND GREAT BRITAIN (2)

More often than not the rhythm of life in the hell-holes that most presbyteries are, is set by some old harridan euphemistically called "the parish priest's housekeeper" whose word, by virtue of her intimate relationship with her employer, is usually of far more weight than that of his assistant priest's (curate's). If, during the course of the day, the parish priest and curate meet together, it is usually at meal-times, when nothing but the most inconsequential topics (the vagaries of the parishioners, the velevities of the bishop, the fluctuations in the weekly collections and attendance at Mass...) are ever discussed. All else is frowned upon as too high-brow" and "la-dee-da". As for prayer, study, spiritual reading - with so many meetings to attend and fund-raising activities to organise, what time or even need is there for such egocentric vagaries? And even if, after a day of frenzied activity, of running around in circles like a dog chasing its own tail, one might find oneself with half-an-hour of free time, one is too spiritually and mentally enervated to do anything other than sit down in front of the television, knowing that the morrow, and the day after, and the day after, will bring nothing but a tedious repetition of the same soul-destroying round. In such circumstances is it any wonder that priests who lack spiritual resources (which, it has to be said, not all do) should take either to the bottle or to some clandestine activity of a sexual nature – or to both - as evasion and escapism. - The overwhelming majority of priests think they are doing wonders if they spend as much as ten minutes a day in prayer. I myself have seen many priests recite their prescribed prayers with one eye on the breviary (priest's official prayer book) and the other on the television screen, especially when a football match which interested them was being relayed. And the scant attention given by them to prayer rubs off on their parishioners who, if they make confession of their sins at all to a priest, will limit themselves to mentioning what are nothing more than breaches of etiquette: unpunctuality, impoliteness, greediness, and things of that nature. They, for their part, think that they amply fulfil the demands made of them as good Christians and loyal members of the church if they spend half-an-hour each Sunday attending Mass (at a time which is convenient for them and that does not conflict with their other more pressing social commitments). In short, the vast majority of priests not less than their parishioners are so engrossed in superficial, transient matters, that they have neither the time nor the inclination to give themselves to what the Lord says is "the better part".

I was spiritually unfulfilled and profoundly unhappy, but there was absolutely no one to whom I could turn for guidance... Which of the priests with whom I was habitually in contact would have made even the slightest attempt to understand, let alone sympathies with my problems? I would have been told, had I confided in any of them, that I had brought these problems on myself by not devoting my time and energies to "pastoral work", which, as I have already observed, is thought of only in terms of frenzied activity from morning till night. Of course, the reaction of those priests would have been very different had I told them that I was suffering from some sexual or emotional entanglement: then their prurient little minds would have been titillated and they would have been "all ears", bestowing on me their undivided and lively attention...

Yet as in my heart I knew full well, I had only myself to blame for being in that situation. Had I not resolved before returning to Great Britain to seek reception into Orthodoxy as soon as I had grown accustomed to living here once again? Indeed I had! Yet many years had passed since my return, and there I was, once again procrastinating and procrastinating, delaying and delaying, fabricating all manner of excuses, inventing every kind of pretext for not doing what I *knew* was God's will for me, just as I had procrastinated, delayed, and invented excuses in Spain. There was no justification for what I was doing or rather, *failing* to do. The only excuse – if excuse it be - that I can make for such inertia is that, attracted spiritually and intellectually by Orthodoxy and thoroughly

dissatisfied with the Roman church though I was, I still had a residual, almost atavistic fear that the Roman church was the only true one and that consequently, if I were to secede from it, the eternal salvation of my immortal soul would be in grave jeopardy. Such fear, I am given to understand, frequently impedes members of some cult or other from severing their links with it even though they long to break away and be free.

But then came Christmas Day 1984!!!... I was at the time curate to a boorish, semi-literate, mentally unbalanced upstart of an Irishman called Thomas Grafferty whose psychological derangement would manifest itself in sudden and quite unprovoked outburst of abuse and tantrums which were always heralded by his face, the contours and expression of which closely resemble those of a pumpkin lantern, turning the colour of a beetroot. Invited to dine at his presbytery that day were priests from the neighbouring parishes, all of them Irish, all of them as boorish and semi-literate as their host, but none of them as unbalanced as he. Suddenly the "red alert" appeared on Grafferty's face and he rounded on me with a torrent of obloquy, saying that the bishop who ordained me to the priesthood must have been out of his mind. The guests were taken aback and obviously embarrassed, but what could they do; they were his guests? I, however, had put up with his loutish behaviour quite long enough. "Father", I said, "it is perfectly true that today we celebrate the birth of him who, for our sake, deigned to be born in a manger where there was an ass. But that is no reason why I should sit a table with one." And leaving him and everyone else discomfited at that philippic, I rose from table and withdrew to my office, where I telephoned the bishop so as to apprise him both of my exchange with Grafferty in the dining-room and of my firm resolve to withdraw my services from him; we were, I told the bishop, both guilty of hypocrisy and living a lie by giving the parishioners the impression that all was well between us, whereas in fact nothing was.

The bishop, a somewhat inhibiting, but nonetheless kindly man who took a genuine interest in the welfare of his priests, asked me whether, if he summoned the priest in question to the telephone and commanded him to make me an apology in the presence of his guests, I would accept it. I told him that I would not, since apologies, if they are to be regarded as genuine, cannot be coerced. The bishop took my point and said that within the first fortnight of the new year he would transfer me to another parish. When I learnt the name of that parish, my heart sank! For I knew that I would be living with a foppish young epicene whose delusions of grandeur induced him to go about telling anyone silly enough to pay attention to him that he would soon be appointed Rector of the Venerable English College in Rome, where he had been a student, and that after a stint there, he would be consecrated bishop of some diocese or other in England or Wales. (But now, instead of the forked hat of a western bishop, he has to make do with a postman's peak-cap, his weakness for personable young boys having brought him to the notice of the police.)

I durst not express my misgiving to the bishop as there were limits even to *his* sympathy and forbearance; but as soon as I took up my new appointment I found that my apprehensions had been more than justified. The presbytery had been turned into what was virtually a male brothel: high-pitched prattle could be heard there at all hours of the day and night (especially the latter), while the stench of cheap perfume pervaded the whole atmosphere, so that I had to leave the windows of my room open all the time, even though it was the depth of winter.

And that it was that finally decided me to implement the plan which I had made years before, and which should have been executed much sooner, to seek admission into Orthodoxy. I do not complain of the disagreeable conditions in which I had lived; I had brought them on myself, and they were God's way of "bringing me to heel".

Chapter Ten: HOMEWARD BOUND

It was not until he was utterly destitute and forced to relieve the agonies of starvation by filling his stomach with pigswill that the Prodigal Son came to his senses and turned his thoughts to home. It was not until I had, by firsthand experience and profound, personal, psychological, spiritual and material distress, become aware of the folly and the sinfulness of my continuing to be a member and priest of the Roman church, that I finally decided to seek to be received into Orthodoxy.

But having at long last made that irrevocable decision, I found that I was in for a very great surprise. Unaware of the ravages of the new heresy of ecumenism, I had naively and quite mistakenly assumed that, as far as its practicalities were concerned, my reception into Orthodoxy would pose no greater difficulties than did my reception into the Roman church. All that I would have to do (or so I thought) would be to present myself to an Orthodox priest or bishop, tell him of my desire to be a member of the Church to which he belonged, and, after evincing proof of the sincerity and integrity of my wish, and submitting myself to an appropriate catechumenate, be admitted to church membership.

However, as I have just intimated, I was not allowing for the obstacles that the heresy of ecumenism would place in my way - obstacles that more than once seemed insurmountable. For no matter to whom I addressed my request to be received into the Church, I invariably received essentially the same reply couched in terms that were correlative to the degree of urbanity and breeding of the one who gave it: It was my duty to remain within the Roman church which, within relatively short time, would be reunited with Orthodoxy, as the frequent exchanges between the Vatican, Constantinople, and other Orthodox jurisdictions clearly indicated!

The first person to whom turned for help was a fellow-Welshman who had begun his ecclesiastical career as lay-brother in two different Anglican monastic houses. From that state he had progressed to the ordained ministry in the Welsh branch of the Anglican Communion. That ministry he resigned on becoming (for a brief period) a Roman Catholic and novice of a Benedictine abbey in England; then, on finding that neither Roman Catholicism nor the monastic life suited him, he reverted for a time to the Anglican faith or lack of it. But, unable to settle into that, he was received into Orthodoxy, first in its Western-, then in its Byzantine-Slavonic rite expressions.

In that man, I was convinced I had found the ideal person to assist me. I was quite mistaken. There is a certain kind of Welshman who is never happy unless he is thoroughly miserable, pretending to see gloom and doom everywhere. And the priest I now write of was just such a one. During the almost two months that I spent in his house he had virtually only three topics of conversation: the sexual improprieties of some Anglican clergymen whom he had known; the almost intolerably onerous duties of an Orthodox priest; the innumerable occasions on which he had been "traded" (a word which featured large in his vocabulary) by those whom he thought he could trust. As for receiving me into Orthodoxy, he would not hear of it. That was quite out of the question. And with the light of hindsight I can see clearly that that was a blessing in disguise, as certain things that the priest did flagrantly contravened the holy canons. But after weeks of being bombarded with daily litanies of grievances, instead of being afforded the spiritual blessings and happiness of Orthodoxy, I left that priest more spiritually depressed than I had been before going to him. How was it, I asked myself (and him) that someone who wished to become member of the Church which he himself represented and claimed was the true Church, should be rejected? It was a question that I had cause to pose many times in the immediate future. (Subsequently I learnt that the priest, along with all the other priests of the same jurisdiction, had received strict orders from his archbishop not to receive Anglican and Roman Catholic clergymen into Orthodoxy. Had I previously been aware of that, I would not have approached him in the first place.)

Next I addressed a Russian metropolitan whom I had known for very many years; in fact it was he whom, long before his elevation to the episcopacy, when he was still a simple priest, I had met during my first experience of Orthodoxy that fateful Sunday morning while "hanging around" after Mass in Westminster Cathedral waiting for the "pubs" to open. I had been in frequent, though not regular contact with him ever since. I had translated his writings into Spanish; I had met him in Paris when I was studying there; I had invited him to give a course of talks at *El Centro Ecuménico Juan XXIII* in Madrid when I was its Warden. Surely, I thought, *he would* enable me to achieve my purpose. And so he would, had he not been instructed by the then Patriarch of Moscow, Pimen, not to receive any Roman Catholic, priest, under his *omophorion* (the equivalent of incardination into a diocese of the Roman church) and to withdraw from such priests who already served under it their *antimensia* (*i.e.* the cloth placed on the Holy Table and upon which a priest serves the Holy Mysteries, bestowed upon him by his bishop and betokening his canonical status).

Then I applied for acceptance to an archbishop in Paris, a German who had converted to Orthodoxy from Lutheranism. There was a repetition of the by then all-too-familiar sad story. During the hour or so that I was with him, in his office he reiterated over, and over in a, grammatically correct, but Teutonically guttural French, that what I was asking of him was quite out of the question - *tout-à-vait impossible*. He at one point asked me what my bishop would say if he knew what I was up to. "Much the same, I imagine, as your Lutheran bishop said to you when he learnt of your intention to become Orthodox," was my reply which, though of no positive effect, at least gave me the immense satisfaction of making him look sheepish, as he had not known that I was familiar with his antecedents. But, perceiving that my entreaties were falling on deaf ears, while my own had grown weary of his noises, I took my leave saying that if Dante were writing *La Divina Comedia* today, I was persuaded that he would reserve a corner of Hell for hypocritical Orthodox hierarchs.

(There was indeed one Orthodox jurisdiction - a so-called "uncanonical" jurisdiction which would have accepted me. - The fact that it was considered uncanonical did not bother me, for, as I have discovered, such jurisdictions not infrequently are far more loyal, to the holy canons than the professedly "canonical" ones are. But orthodoxy has to go hand-in-hand with orthopraxis; and it grieved me that much of what I witnessed in two establishments - one in Europe, the other in the U.S.A. - of that jurisdiction would not be tolerated in any ordinary Christian household, let alone communities purporting to be monastic.)

I was becoming angry, not so much at being denied admission to Orthodoxy, as at the reasons for that denial, which, I soon discovered, were pecuniary rather than "ecumenical". The different Orthodox communities of the diaspora benefit, quite considerably from the financial generosity of Canterbury and Rome, and many such communities in the United Kingdom which are either too poor or whose membership is too exiguous for them to have churches of their own are allowed the use of Anglican (but not Roman Catholic) buildings. But there are strings attached. It is impressed upon these communities that they will show their gratitude for such generosity by doing everything they can to dissuade, or rather, to deter, would-be converts from joining them; and they are expressly forbidden to receive converts from among the ranks of the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy. If, they should have the temerity to disregard these, prohibitions, such very dubious privileges as the Anglican and the Roman churches concede to them will be forfeited. In other words in the diaspora Orthodox jurisdictions have sold their sacred birthright for a dish of lentils.

With reference to this lamentable state of affairs I once remarked to a Greek hierarch living in the diaspora that if the first apostles had heeded the Sanhedrin's admonition to preach no more in the Name of Jesus, it seems most unlikely that there would be any

Christian church today. His reply was that the apostles were preaching the Gospel to Jews and pagans, whereas the Orthodox churches in the dispersion exist side-by-side, and have friendly relations with other Christian bodies. That may be true. But, as I then pointed out to that hierarch: it does not suffice to profess just *any* sort of belief in Christ (even Jehovah's Witnesses, the Moonies, and Muslims do him the honour of calling him "a great guy"). What is required of the true believer is *right* faith and *right* worship – the twofold meaning of the word *Orthodoxy*.

Coming to see that no good would result from the course of action that I had up to that point pursued; envisaging also the very real danger that I would relapse into Roman Catholicism, or (worse still) become utterly disillusioned with any form of religious sentiment, I decided to heed the advice that some Orthodox friends had given me on more than one occasion.....advice which, for reasons that I shall, refer to in the next brief and final chapter, I had been reluctant to take : I went to the Holy Mountain of Athos, where, as I have already stated in the Preface, I at last became a member of Christ's Church on the Feast of Pentecost, 1993.

Chapter Eleven: FORMS OF RECEPTIONS INTO THE ORTHODOX FAITH

The information contained in this final chapter will, I hope, be of some assistance to readers who are unfamiliar with Orthodox procedure for the reception of converts.

A convert to Orthodoxy who is already a member of some Christian denomination may be received in any one of the following three ways, the first two of which are for the reception of lay persons, the third being intended for the reception of priests of the Roman Catholic, the non Chalcedonian, and other Eastern churches (it is not used for the reception of Anglican or other Protestant ministers)

1. by "economy" (καθ' οικονομια); this form of reception is in many respects similar to the Roman Catholic practice of "healing in the root" (sanatio in radice) and requires the proselyte to recite the Symbol of Faith (Creed) three times in its pristine form, after which he/she will be chrismated (anointed with chrism) and will receive the Pure Mysteries (Holy Communion). Reception by "economy" should never create a precedent or be used indiscriminately, as regrettably is now generally the case in western Europe; for then it ceases to be "economy" becoming instead "paranomy" (παράνομια), i.e. lawlessness. It should be resorted to only when circumstances make it impossible to be received by
2. "strictness" (κατ' ακριβεια), that is to say, by baptism;
3. by "vesting"; a form sometimes used for the reception of priests, and according to which the priest will, after being chrismated, join with the bishop in serving the Divine Liturgy.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that it is not that "economy" tacitly recognizes the grace (*i.e.* validity) of mysteries (*i.e.* sacraments) administered by heterodox bodies, whereas "strictness" expressly denies their grace. On this point Orthodox teaching is clear and unequivocal: *every mystery, no matter how "orthodox" its matter and form, or the intention of the one who administers it may be, that is not administered within the Orthodox communion is null, and void of grace.* (The logic underpinning this seeming intransigence is really quite simple: the mysteries (sacraments) are the pearls of the Church. Heretics, simply by virtue of the fact that they are heterodox, are quite clearly *not* members of the Church. "Economy", therefore, merely normalises an *abnormal* situation. On that account it may be regarded as roughly equivalent to the Roman Catholic principle of "healing in the root". The "external" conditions and circumstances of one convert to Orthodoxy may be identical to those of another; yet if one of them be received by "economy", that fact should not lead the other to suppose that he/she will be thus received. As has already been said: "economy" must never create a precedent and should be used only when for very good and cogent reasons it would be either impossible or inexpedient to apply "strictness". And what those reasons may be only the receiving bishop or presbyter is competent to determine in each individual case.

Knowing that, if I were to be received into Orthodoxy on the Holy Mountain I would be received by "strictness", I was, for a long time reluctant to go there. To have to disown the "grace" of all the "mysteries" which, as a Roman Catholic priest I had both received and administered, was a very bitter pill to swallow. But then, changing the metaphor, I came to see that if only that much was being asked of me so that I might possess "a pearl of great price", it was very little indeed.