

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

It is mid-September as I write these notes. Stephen Hawking's new book has been receiving a lot of advance publicity recently, and later today Pope Benedict arrives in Scotland.

Our Summer Conference at the end of July already seems long past. It was the first Conference where Sibylle Batten, as Conference Organiser, was in charge of the arrangements. I know I was not alone in appreciating her efficiency and unobtrusive helpfulness. Also particularly noteworthy was the contribution of Charles Hetherington in providing and leading the choir. We are grateful he was able to accept our invitation to do this. There was a time when we seemed to have enough willing and experienced singers for us to be able to assume a competent choir would be available without any special consideration needing to be given to it by the committee. This seems to be no longer the case. We are also grateful to Nicholas Chapman for again providing a bookstall. He has supported the Annual Conference in this way for many years, but now that he lives in America it is more difficult for him. I have myself just finished a most interesting book bought from him then. Thinking ahead, the Youth Committee is completing its arrangements for the Summer 2011 Annual Conference; and I have just been having a telephone conversation with a Fellowship member about a possible topic the Summer 2012 Conference.

In my last notes I expressed concern about the lack of progress with the January/February 2011 Study Weekend. This has now been resolved most excellently, and you should receive details with this copy of *Forerunner*. I am very much looking forward to being there myself. We have also been working on the 2012 Study Weekend in Lincoln. Only the local arrangements for that remain to be completed. The Fellowship does like to work with a local parish and make the Study Weekend a joint effort. The host parish has the opportunity to present a larger event than it could normally, and those of us who visit have the opportunity to meet members of the parish and worship with them. If your parish would be willing to host a Study Weekend do let me know. We would now be thinking of January/February 2013. If you also have a topic in mind – perhaps even a speaker – that is even better.

I had an email from James Higgs (now Deacon Dionysius James) earlier this month to say they had an excellent pilgrimage to Romania and were all safely back. Overseas pilgrimages have always been one-off events I know they are popular and I hope we can have more. A report on the pilgrimage appears in this issue of *Forerunner*, as well as a report on the Family Camp, which has become an annual, much-appreciated event. I must also mention the Youth Committee, who organise many activities that have much enthusiastic support. That these events have because so much part of the Fellowship's activities should not be allowed to lessen appreciation of the Youth Committee's work. Ultimately every event depends on the commitment of a few dedicated people who feel what they are doing is important and worthwhile.

As usual, we had our AGM at the end of the Annual Conference. In my Notes in the last newsletter I suggested members might like to submit postal nominations. In the event there were none. We invite those who have special knowledge of activities being organised to attend committee meetings, although they cannot vote. If you have suggestions for future meetings, or are offering to help in some way, or have a good idea, do please talk it over with a committee member and consider asking them to present it to the committee. Alternatively email myself or Gladys Bland, our Secretary.

*John Speak, Chairman*

## **FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL SUMMER CONFERENCE 2010**

**The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, 30 July - 1 August 2010**

### *Conference Report*

After months of preparation and planning, the conference participants and speakers began to arrive – from Sweden and Northern Ireland, the Lebanon and the USA and, of course, all over England and Wales. Nicholas Chapman and his much-appreciated bookstall set up, Reader Stephen Weston found a perfect spot to display his icons for sale, bedrooms were allocated, last-minute dietary concerns discussed with the ever-helpful staff at The Hayes... and the Conference Organiser could begin to relax! Many helping pairs of hands behind the scenes made this conference a pleasure to organise, and a very big and public ‘thank you’ has to go to Jenny and Bede Gerrard whose experience and expertise in organising Fellowship conferences made my job so much easier!

‘Mothers and Fathers in God: Spiritual Guidance in the Orthodox Church’ was the overarching topic of the conference, and the speakers, Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia, Father John Hookway, Sister Magdalen (Tolleshunt Knights), Archimandrite Kyril Jenner and Archimandrite Jack Khalil, were all very different but all much appreciated. I am glad that texts of their talks will be published. The speakers explored the roles of the Spiritual Guide as counsellor, burden-bearer, intercessor, forming a relationship with the spiritual child that extends to death and beyond, a relationship through which the Gospel is made personal. Through the life-stories of Yeronta Ephraim Katounakiotis (1912-1998) and Archimandrite Barnabas Burton (1915-1996) both the challenges and the love inherent in the relationship between spiritual child and guide became apparent. It struck me that both were men who gave much, but also demanded much in return, reminding me of Metropolitan Kallistos’ comment that the spiritual child is a ‘disciple who learns from the spiritual guide’s way of life’. And as Fr Barnabas’ life demonstrated, the life of a spiritual guide is not necessarily straightforward – his call to set up the first Orthodox monastic community in England seemed to be beset by U-turns, frequent moves around the country, and novices who could not stomach his cooking, and left for other pastures!

Sr Magdalen took up the theme of ‘Spiritual Guidance for Children and Young People’ and spoke very movingly about the innate spiritual life of children who from conception have their own and special relationship with God. Her message: ‘You become holy – and your children will become holy!’ was a challenge not only to the parents in the audience, but to all of us who welcome children into our parishes at home. Hers was a call to a life of prayer (‘don’t stop talking to God about your children’), and a reminder that children pray about everything – what we as adults need to do is to take the spiritual life of our children seriously, and not be tempted to make our love conditional on the child’s piety. Welcome all children, with a spirit of freedom, let them have fun, and be prepared to use the catechism flexibly. Wise words indeed.

On Sunday morning after the Liturgy, Archimandrite Jack Khalil spoke on ‘St Paul’s Pattern of Spiritual Guidance, and its influence on the teaching of His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius and other recent Syrian and Lebanese spiritual guides’. Pauline exegesis is a particular area of expertise for Fr Jack, and I was grateful that he shared his insights with us, demonstrating how St Paul’s teachings on spiritual guidance can shape our spiritual lives today.

The topic of spiritual guidance was also carried into the workshops which had been offered by four kind volunteers – thank you to Fr Irenaeus du Plessis, Fr John Musther, Dr Frank Johnson and Bede Gerrard. Workshop participants discussed ‘The culture of dependency’ in spiritual guidance, as well as the role of the Holy Spirit, and the importance of the guide’s prayer life for the spiritual child – all topics which, so participants agreed, merit further in-depth exploration.

A particular source of delight for me was the beauty of the Liturgy. The choir, so ably led by Charles Hetherington, only came together at the conference and practised late into the night to provide a much-appreciated service to all of us. It was wonderful to have so many Orthodox from different jurisdictions together to celebrate the Liturgy, and to be able to share this treasure also with our friends from other faith traditions who came to the conference to learn more about Orthodoxy in a ‘weekend community setting’.

The conference was an opportunity to catch up with old friends, and to forge new friendships; a chance to meet Orthodox sisters and brothers from outside the UK, learn from each other, offer support, plan visits; and welcome those new to the Fellowship over a shared meal. The Hayes provided the perfect setting, and staff responded to our habitual lateness for meals and rather unusual meal requests with good grace. We’ll be back!

So what have I learnt?

Don’t panic when applications don’t come flooding in – Orthodox folk tend to do things in their own good time and all will be well ...

Make sure you’ll have a few spare rooms available – folk will turn up on the day ‘on the off chance there’s a bed’.

Make sure you have access to the Chapel key at all times – a locked chapel at 7am when Morning Prayer is about to start is a rather stressful start to the day!

And above all – smile and enjoy the conference!

*Sibylle Batten*

\*\*\*\*\*

## **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE?**

### **Not things but persons**

What matters most of all in our experience of the Christian life is not things but persons. We are to understand spiritual guidance in exactly this perspective. It signifies the Gospel made personal. The Gospel is not to be interpreted in fixed and abstract terms, as a legal code, a set of moral rules. It is, on the contrary, the Good News of salvation in Christ; and this message of Good News is communicated to each one of us in a specific and immediate way, directly and personally. God does not just speak to humankind in a detached manner, lumping everyone together into a vast and indiscriminate whole. He speaks to each one of us in a distinctive way, face to face and heart to heart. Each human person is unique and unrepeatable, and so the Good News is communicated to each in a unique and unrepeatable way.

It is precisely this unique character of each human person that is respected and enhanced in the Orthodox tradition of spiritual guidance. A code of moral rules offers the same recommendations to everyone. But what the *abba* or *amma* –the spiritual father or mother – offers is not a set of inflexible rules but a personal relationship. Within that personal relationship there is room for inexhaustible variety. The unvarying truth of the Christian faith is transmitted to each one in the particular form that each one personally needs to hear. The spiritual father or mother is of course consistent and truthful testimony. He or she is not an opportunist or a chameleon. Yet at the same time they adapt their guidance to the specific situations of their spiritual children. The mother or father in Christ is in this way the guardian of evangelical freedom.

### **Compassion and co-suffering**

To illustrate more precisely how it is that the spiritual guide provides not rules and regulations but a personal relationship, let us take three representative descriptions of the elder, the *geronta* or *starets*. First, in the *Gerontikon* or *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, it is stated of a certain

unnamed hermit, ‘He possessed love and many came to him.’<sup>1</sup> There, expressed in the simplest possible way, is the heart of the matter. The personal relationship between the *abba* and the disciple is founded upon love. Second, the all-embracing character of this relationship is summed up by Fyodor Dostoevsky in a sentence from his master-work *The Brothers Karamazov*: ‘A *starets* is one who takes your soul, your will into his soul and into his will.’<sup>2</sup> Third, this all-embracing relationship extends beyond the grave into life eternal. St Seraphim of Sarov enjoined that these words should be written on his tomb, for the benefit of his spiritual children: ‘When I am no more, come to me at my grave, and the more often, the better. Whatever weighs on your soul, whatever may have happened to you, whatever sorrows you have, come to me as if I were alive, and kneeling on the ground, cast all your bitterness upon my grave. Tell me everything and I shall listen to you, and all the sorrow will fly away from you. As you spoke to me when I was alive, do so now. For to you I am alive, and I shall be for ever.’<sup>3</sup> St John (Maximovitch) of San Francisco spoke in similar terms to one of his spiritual children in a dream: ‘Although I have died, yet I am alive.’

From these passages we can discern what are the essential characteristics of the spiritual guide. The first and most fundamental characteristic is humble love, a vivid and ever-burning compassion. This compassion implies a double openness, to the Holy Spirit on the one side, and to all humankind on the other. The spiritual guide is a burden-bearer and a co-sufferer, who makes his or her own the sorrows and the joys of others. She or he lives out to the full two sayings of St Paul: ‘Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2); ‘If one member [of the body] suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it’ (1Cor. 12:27). In this way the father or mother in God exemplifies pre-eminently what the Anglican poet-theologian Charles Williams termed ‘the way of exchange’ or ‘substituted love’, in other words, the mystery of co-inherence. All this is well expressed in the Celtic term for the spiritual guide, *amchara*, ‘soul-friend’.

### **Creative Silence**

Hearing all this affirmed concerning the spiritual guide we may well be tempted to respond: ‘This is far too high and exalted for me; I could never even begin to realise such a vocation.’ But let us not be too quick to draw such a conclusion. The Holy Spirit chooses the most unexpected people. God can speak through Balaam’s ass (Numbers 22:28). Let us also remember that when someone becomes a spiritual guide, the initiative almost always comes from others. The *geronta* or *starets* does not put him/herself forward, saying: ‘Here am I; come to me; I have the answers and will help you.’ On the contrary, it is usually other people who reveal to the spiritual father the vocation to which Christ is calling him. This we see from the life of St Antony of Egypt written by his friend St Athanasius. Antony had withdrawn into the desert and enclosed himself in a ruined fort, with no idea at all of acting as a director and teacher of others. It was his friends who eventually sought him out and broke down the entrance to the fort. If he then became what Athanasius terms ‘a physician given by God to Egypt’,<sup>4</sup> it was because others took the path into the remote desert and implored him to act as their guide.

The same is true of St Seraphim of Sarov. When people tried to visit him during his years as a hermit in the forest, he refused to speak to them. Likewise, when he was subsequently enclosed in a cell within the monastery, at first he received absolutely no one, and spoke to nobody. Later,

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, alphabetical collection, Poemen 8.

<sup>2</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*, tr. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 1991), p.27.

<sup>3</sup> Archimandrite Lazarus (Moore), *An Extraordinary Peace: St. Seraphim, Flame of Sarov* (Port Townsend, WA: Anaphora Press, 2009), p.278 (translation adapted).

<sup>4</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony*, p.87.

under constant pressure from others, he somewhat relaxed his strictness and began to receive visitors, but at first he listened to them in silence and prayed for them, without offering them any counsel. It was only towards the end of his life that he embarked fully on the apostolic ministry of the *starets*. Very clearly in the life of Seraphim, we see how the initiative came from others. It is noteworthy that initially St Seraphim listened to others without actually speaking to them. We can all of us imitate him in this. Perhaps we feel that God has not endowed us with the gift of counsel and instruction, but we can each of us try to be a good listener. Often others are helped more by our creative silence than by our eloquent speech. The importance of listening was strikingly disclosed to me early in my priestly ministry. During the later 1960s I used to visit regularly a monastery in central France. One Saturday evening, after the Vigil Service, which had lasted nearly three hours, an elderly Russian layman, a pensioner in the monastery, came to me for confession. He had endured lengthy imprisonment in Russia, his wife and children had been killed, and he had lost everything. The main theme of his confession was that his heart was filled with bitterness: he longed to forgive those who had inflicted such suffering on him and those he loved, but he could not bring himself to do so. The confession lasted about 45 minutes. When he had finished, I tried to offer some words of reassurance and hope, and gave him absolution.

The next Saturday, after the Vigil, he came again for confession, and began to tell me at even greater length all the same things. I was tired and hungry, and so I grew restless. ‘You told me all this last Saturday,’ I said. ‘There is no need to tell me again.’ He responded in anger. ‘Priest!’ he exclaimed. ‘Keep silent! It is I who am speaking. As for you – listen!’ So I allowed him to finish; and after saying what best I could, once more I gave him absolution. But that was not the end of the story. A few days later, suddenly and unexpectedly, he died. He had no chance to go again for confession; the double confession that he made to me was the last during his earthly life. That experience taught me the importance of listening.

### **Counsellor, Intercessor, Burden-bearer**

In two primary texts on spiritual guidance – St John Climacus, *To the Shepherd*, and St Symeon the New Theologian, *Letter on Confession* – there are three qualities above all that are emphasized.<sup>5</sup> The spiritual father or mother is counsellor, intercessor and burden-bearer.

It is important to keep in mind that the ministry of eldership is essentially charismatic. It is a ministry that expresses the Church as event rather than the Church as institution. The spiritual guide is not ordained or appointed by higher ecclesiastical authority, but he or she is revealed by the Holy Spirit to the conscience of the Christian people. The bishop does indeed appoint priests to perform the office of confessor, that is, to minister the sacrament of confession and to confer absolution. But he cannot appoint someone to act as a *geronta* or *starets* in the broader and deeper sense. The elder – whether man or woman, whether priest, monk, nun, or lay person in the ‘world’ – is not commissioned or nominated but recognized.

A charismatic elder, according to Climacus and Symeon, is in the first place a counsellor (*symvoulos*). In certain situations, as already emphasized, he may give help through his silence, through being a good listener. But in most cases he will provide spiritual healing through his words, through his counsel or advice. In *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* what the visitor or disciple says to the *abba* is commonly, ‘Speak a word to me, how I may be saved.’ If his words are indeed to prove words of healing and salvation, then what he needs above all is the grace-given gift of *diakrisis*, of insight and discernment, the ability to perceive the secrets in the heart of

---

<sup>5</sup> See my article, ‘The Spiritual Father in Saint John Climacus and Saint Symeon the New Theologian’, foreword to Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Cistercian Studies Series 116. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), pp.vii-xxxiii. Compare Kallistos Ware, ‘The Spiritual Guide in Orthodox Christianity’, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000), pp.127-51.

others, and so to speak ‘a word in season’ (Proverbs 15:23). At the same time the spiritual guide instructs his disciples not only through his words but through his total way of life. In the words of Abba Poemen, ‘Be an example, not a lawgiver.’<sup>6</sup> According to St Benedict, ‘The abbot ought to rule his disciples by deeds rather than words.’<sup>7</sup> There is a Jewish saying, ‘I learned the Torah from all the limbs of my teacher.’ As the eleventh-century Kievan text *The Admonition of the Father to his Son* insists, ‘Seek out a God-fearing man... Adhere to him with soul and body; observe his life, his walking, sitting, looking, eating, and examine all his habits.’<sup>8</sup> When St Antony of Egypt asked a monk who came regularly to visit him why he never put any questions to him, the other replied, ‘It is enough for me just to look at you, father.’<sup>9</sup>

The *abba* heals, however, not only by his words of counsel and by the example of his life, but by his prayers. And so he is called to be, in the second place, an intercessor (*presbevtis*). In *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, the visitor says, not merely ‘Speak a word to me’, but ‘Pray for me.’ This is a recurrent theme in the answers given by the sixth-century elders of Gaza, St Barsanuphius and St John: ‘Night and day’, they say, ‘I am praying for you unceasingly to God.’<sup>10</sup> I recall a visit made some years ago by a friend of mine, an American, to Fr Paisios, the greatest *geronta* on Mt Athos in the late twentieth century. At the end of their conversation my friend said to him, ‘May I write to you sometimes to ask for advice?’ ‘No,’ Fr Paisios replied, ‘don’t write; but I will pray for you.’ My American friend felt this as a rebuff. But another monk who was present said to him afterwards, ‘Don’t be sad. The *geronta*’s advice is wonderful, but his prayers are far, far better.’ In promising to pray rather than to correspond, Fr Paisios had offered him not what was less but what was more. Elder and disciple, it should be noted, are bound in a two-way relationship: if the elder prays for the disciple, at the same time he too needs the prayers of his spiritual children.

In the third place, the spiritual guide is not only a counsellor and intercessor but a burden-bearer. Here the Greek word used by Climacus and Symeon is *anadochos*, meaning someone who assumes responsibility and stands surety for another. The term is applied to Christ as the redeemer of our souls, to the godparent at baptism, and to the sponsor at a monastic profession. As well as praying for his children, the elder takes on his shoulders the weight of their temptations and guilt. This is strikingly illustrated in the ancient rite of confession, as found in the Penitential attributed to St John the Faster. In the present-day practice, at the moment of absolution the priest places his stole (*epitrachilion*) on the head of the penitent, and then puts his hand on the stole, making the sign of the cross on the penitent’s head. In the ancient rite, however, the gesture was reversed, and at the moment of absolution the penitent laid his hand on the neck or shoulders of the priest, thus signifying that the burden of guilt was transferred from the penitent to the absolving priest. As St Barsanuphius wrote to one of his spiritual children, ‘I am bearing your burdens and offences.’<sup>11</sup>

This emphasis upon the bearing of burdens should not lead us to imagine that the relationship between elder and the spiritual child is somehow dark and sombre. On the contrary, between the two there can often be humour and playfulness, joy and laughter. I myself witnessed this when I

---

<sup>6</sup> *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, alphabetical collection, Poemen 174.

<sup>7</sup> *Rule of St Benedict* 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in G.P.Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, vol.i, *Kievan Christianity, the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p.215.

<sup>9</sup> *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, alphabetical collection, Antony 27.

<sup>10</sup> *Letter* 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Letter* 239.

visited Fr Paisios of Athos. I saw it also in the *geronta* of Patmos, Fr Amphilochios, whom I met many times in the 1960s.

People often lament that, though they have searched diligently, they have not been able to find a spiritual guide. Here it should be remembered that there are many different kinds of spiritual mothers or fathers. Not all of them will be like St Seraphim or Fr Paisios, who could alter people's lives through a single meeting, and sometimes through a single sentence, often answering the doubts and problems of their visitors before the latter had the chance to put their questions in words. There are numerous priests and lay persons who, while lacking the spectacular endowments of the famous elders, can yet in a more humble and less startling way provide us with exactly the help we need. Perhaps, in looking far and wide for distant treasures, we are neglecting the opportunities that God is setting before us near at hand. Moreover, let us never forget that, besides spiritual fatherhood and motherhood, there is spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood. Frequently we learn more from our peers than from our teachers.

Let us in conclusion recall what was said in the beginning about the heart of the matter, the one thing needed. As was said in the *Gerontikon*, 'He possessed love, and many came to him.' Without compassionate love on the part of the 'soul-friend', there can be no authentic spiritual eldership. None can be a true 'soul-friend' unless he is able to say to his spiritual children with full conviction what St Barsanuphius said to those under his charge: 'I care for you more than you care for yourself – and God cares for you even more than that.'<sup>12</sup>

*Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia*

\*\*\*\*\*

## **THE SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

One helpful way to consider human beings is to think of each of us as having three constituent elements: physical, psychological and spiritual. The psychological and spiritual together make up the invisible aspect. Since the time of St Paul these two 'levels' of the soul have usually been distinguished. The ψυχή being all the thoughts and feelings, while the πνεύμα, the spirit, the highest element in man, is what enables him [sorry, I can't keep saying 'or her'; count it implied] to have a personal relationship with the Uncreated Spirit, God. The human soul comes into being at our conception: the new body and soul together constitute an addition to the human race that is absolutely unique and irreplaceable, a precious child of God, whom He loves into existence. The ultimate destiny of this new person depends in the final analysis on his own will, and how far he collaborates with grace or resists grace.

All of us are in the process of development towards our final destiny. Our spiritual development, our flowering as true persons or hypostases in the likeness of the divine Persons of the Trinity, or our spiritual darkness and atrophy, are inseparable from our psychological and physical life. Children remind us that our relationship with God is not a separate compartment of life: they ask Him for toys, they love Him along with their pets... All guidance has a spiritual effect. At the same time, spiritual progress – a closer relationship to God and resemblance to Him – is not conditioned by our physical or intellectual abilities. Whoever we are, we have the potential to become a son or daughter of God and live divine life. Spiritually, a newly baptised baby may be more advanced than an adult, though of course the latter is intellectually and physically way ahead. A child has his relationship with God from his conception. A baby can make a spiritual decision, for example to accept or refuse Holy Communion.

---

<sup>12</sup> Letter 39.

The adults who are guiding are not in control of the child's relationship with God; they have no right to control the child's will itself, only to train the child in wise use of it. Everyone has spiritual freedom that even God will not override unless invited to do so by the person concerned. Spiritual guidance means fostering this free relationship with God, with His mother, with the saints. A spiritual act must be free if it is to have a positive effect on a person's own destiny. At the same time, we can enable this relationship to be as full as possible if the childhood home is full of love, truth and prayer. An expectant mother's state has an effect on her child. The child is acclimatised to prayer. Archimandrite Sophrony describes the grace he experienced in the arms of his prayerful nanny.

Fostering the child's free will does not mean always letting a child have his own way. There may be times when an adult has to force a small child against his own will to do or not do something, especially before speech (when words can be understood). But we can calmly explain why we are doing so even to a screaming baby: 'I know you don't want this but I have to do it; we'll soon be finished.' We have no right to show reproach when a child acts wrongly out of ignorance; we have to start by telling him 'No'. A child does not have moral responsibility for what he has not been taught in a reasonable way. Reproach is for naughtiness; carelessness may be reproachable in this sense, but accidents are not as bad as deliberate damage, and a clumsy two-year-old is not blameworthy in the sense that a careless ten-year-old is. [Parents' wrath varies according to the cost of the broken object; unfair!] If we criticise bad behaviour, we do so without putting the child down so far that he feels incapable of good, or unloved. We are teaching a person, not merely 'correcting behaviour'.

As far as possible, children must be taught by example, words, and tone of voice to collaborate willingly, to obey freely. The key to this is consistency. Certain gestures/words mean 'No' without negotiation; we refuse a child without bad temper; time is spent turning the attention away; obvious pleasure is shown when the child collaborates. Children like rules when there are not too many; when the boundaries are clear, they know where they stand. The child needs to practise living with other people; he needs to learn what is safe and right and what is not. This is not a matter of balance between strictness and laxity: it is a matter of genuine relationships. One parent can support the other; 'Don't speak rudely to your Dad.' 'Thank you for helping Mum by going to bed when she asked you.' Too often it is a battle of wills, a confrontation, with the end result of negative feelings on both sides. If the adult gives in with resignation, confusion results, and the child learns to get his own way by resisting until Mum gets fed up. To cover the hard moments there needs to be a much higher ratio of time when the collaboration involves pleasure, and age-proportional choices where the child dictates what is to happen. Children teach us to slow down and enjoy everyday tasks like walking through a puddle, choosing to wear pink socks, 'helping' to cook. We must not always hurry them; we must give them space to live their life. We must give them our time and our willing ears. The most common complaint of children is not that parents are too strict, but that they don't listen; and don't make time to listen. Guiding teenagers is 99% listening with love and taking them seriously as they really are. We discern by prayer the best moment to analyse a disagreement; it may be when everyone is cooler – St Silouan's father once waited six months to correct him.

If good behaviour just means parents can get on with other things, no wonder naughtiness is used to get attention. 'Now you are behaving nicely I can see we shall manage to go to the park.' Relaxing together, just being there while a child is doing his own thing and you are doing yours, is 'quality time'.

The human soul is by nature made for relationship with God as He Is. Orthodox faith does not need any human contrivance to make it palatable to the heart and mind of a human person. The child who is prepared for, conceived, born and raised in a home where Orthodoxy is practised can

pick it up like a mother tongue and use it as his own at every stage of his physical, moral, and intellectual development. Because Orthodoxy is a living Tradition, it does not need to be rediscovered from scratch by the new generation. At the same time, because it is the only faith that can lead to the fullness of deification, it cannot be imposed on anyone, even by God. To pass it on to the next generation is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of each new child. Even for God, this is a new and unique experience every time. If faith and love are experienced together at home, and the child is supplied with as many means as possible for his own free contact with the Lord, His Mother, His Saints, he can grow into a faithful adult by a smooth process. I have seen this happen. A teenager does need to stretch the elastic, to feel that he can be himself, to try things beyond what is guaranteed to be safe; but he can do this and still go regularly to Church, pray every day, and unashamedly identifying himself as an Orthodox Christian. Our task is to prepare children to live in this world in this time as Orthodox Christians. No one can be totally isolated from potentially unsafe experiences: what might you see in the street? We protect babies totally and we cannot prevent a student away from home from anything. Guiding any child means being there for the child from the time when we decide and supply everything to the time when he is made ready to decide everything independently and supply his own needs. [‘Independently’: not without help, of course; I include knowing how to get help, and of course parents are always there for their children at any age.]

Love is the life of God Himself. Human beings are made to be persons who love, just as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are Persons who love. Unconditional love on the part of parents gives the child security and a certainty that his life is valuable whatever he does. If he goes wrong, there is a way back. So forgiveness must be evident and punishment must not be used juridically. The child apologises and makes up for the sin (e.g. paying for new vase). He is warned in advance so that any punishment is understood as a consequence of his own bad choice: ‘Ask again nicely or I will not give it to you.’ Our words are ‘*logikoi*’, reasonable, clear, fair. Any negotiations are two-way, and not suddenly introduced as a sop to stubborn whining. We pray about what to say, and how, and when. Our love must mirror God’s love so that a Heavenly Father is not a threatening Person. Our love is not even conditional on our child’s piety: this is a problem I often meet, that children in pious families who don’t feel they fit the mould do not feel that God is for them at all. It is one of the reasons for informal catechism, so that any type of child feels welcome and has a chance to learn something. Sunday school only appeals to some. Camps provide wonderful opportunities for supporting faith and allowing free questioning. ‘If you cannot talk to your children about God, talk to God about your children.’ And if you produce a book for teenagers who do not like being preached at, don’t print on the back cover: ‘Get your rebel teens to read this; it will change them!’

Children learn prayers best by praying them as their own. Prayer times near the crib, and later at the icon corner in the morning or before bed, sometimes as a family, sometimes with one adult and one child, mean that the child is praying with us. ‘Let’s pray and ask God to bless the day/night’. They can choose prayers, name people in intercessions, and so on. While they are still young they can ‘Pray by yourself before you go to sleep’, so that if later they do not attend family prayers, prayer continues. Choices can be made by prayer. Prayer in their own words is to be encouraged.

Parents’ prayer for their children has an especial power because of their ontological bond with their child. Parents’ faith in God imbues the air the children breathe even if they articulate their beliefs rarely. Sometimes adults look for strategies to get a certain message over, as if God were not alive and accessible both to them and the child. [Fr Porphyrios: ‘Tell the Mother of God before you tell your child.’] If the first time the child is advised to pray about something is when he has to ask God about a girlfriend the parents obviously disapprove of, the chances are that his

relationship with God is already cool; will he pray openly or go further away, when he sees what look like fulfilling relationships and unconditional love outside the Church, and feels strangled in the Church? Will the parents' anxiety about this poison the air? 'Cast your care on the Lord.' Have we been practising this in our own life? Do we mirror and teach that truth is liberating, not constraining? If we have to move goalposts to safeguard a relationship with an erring teenager, it does not mean we have lost our values; our love for a child as he is is the basic principle of our theology.

Spiritual guidance for all Orthodox Christians involves a father confessor. We must give opportunities for the child from babyhood to have friendly contact with the priest concerned. Before confession begins there can be private conversations about a problem or a theological dilemma. 'Why don't you ask Fr N.?' There are priestly prayers concerning bad dreams, starting school, going on a journey. By seven years old a child is normally going to confession alone. Asking and receiving God's forgiveness is part of my relationship with Him. Perhaps the family still decides when to go: they go as a family during the fasts, for example. But a child can go to the priest any time, and ideally the parents do not even have to know. Due to cases of abuse, child protection issues may oblige the priest to be visible when speaking one-to-one with a child. All the more reason to emphasise the confidentiality of the conversation. It is sad if a child cannot go crying to a priest without anybody knowing.

The strongest influence on a child is his family. Two parents who love God, each other, and all their children individually, and whose life makes all this love evident, are the best spiritual guides. People say that the pressure of this world, or the child's peers, makes raising children to become Godly adults impossible. Again, this means that their guiding principle is unhealthy fear of this world rather than healthy fear of God. 'Be not afraid, I have overcome the world', said our Lord. Happiness ought to exude from us; we must evidently enjoy our children's existence and their company. We live in the Church, against which even the gates of hell shall never prevail, so fullness of life in God is accessible to us here and now. A received faith must first of all be a faith, not merely a set of ideas. Let this faith be our own guide and the spiritual guidance of our children will bear fruit.

*Sister Magdalen*

\*\*\*\*\*

## **HIEROMONK ELDER EPHRAIM OF KATOUNAKIA**

Hieromonk Elder Ephraim of Katounakia (Mt Athos) lived from 1912 to 1998. For 23 years he was a disciple of Elder Joseph the Hesychast, from 1936 until Elder Joseph's repose in 1959. However, he was not of that Elder's brotherhood, so he was in obedience concurrently to another Elder, Nikiphoros, who died in 1973. When he wanted to comfort somebody in their sorrow, Elder Ephraim would repeat to them the words of his Elder Joseph, 'my whole life is martyrdom'. In this 'shedding of blood' Fr Joseph's life was a witness to the presence of the Spirit. As a 'hero of renunciation', the life of Elder Ephraim is also a source of comfort for the body of the Church. For through his thorough self-denial, it is written, he received illumination of divine Grace not as an intermittent consolation but as a permanent condition.<sup>13</sup> In the monastic setting, obedience is the principle at the heart of such spiritual regeneration, which is the purpose of spiritual direction. As well as looking at what this obedience entails according to Elder Ephraim, we shall also consider some of his qualities as a spiritual father through his teaching and example. Two books have been written about Elder Ephraim: *Elder Ephraim of Katounakia*, by hieromonk Joseph, one

---

<sup>13</sup> Elder Joseph of Vatopedi, *Obedience is Life: Elder Ephraim of Katounakia*, p.70.

of his disciples, and *Obedience is Life* by Elder Joseph of Vatopedi, who, though younger than Elder Ephraim, was his contemporary and a fellow disciple of Elder Joseph the Hesychast.

Evangelos Papanikitas, the future Elder Ephraim, was the second child of poor farmers who moved from their village to the neighbouring Thebes for their four children to attend secondary school. Evangelos grew up familiar with going to Church, with confession and Holy Communion. He used to pray at night and his prayer rope hitting the floor as he did his prostrations would wake up his younger brother, to whom he would say, 'Liami, the heavens are open at midnight.' His grandfather was the 'most severe' village priest and his father a cantor. In Thebes Evangelos got to know his future Athonite elders on their occasional visits to their home town, but his father was not at ease with his son's familiarising himself with monasteries. Years later, as an Elder, he wrote to a friend, describing the fruits of patience and prayer: 'When I wanted to become a monk, my parents caught wind of it and forbade me to do it; my father even cursed me. He said, "The curse of the 318 Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council be upon you if you go and become a monk." Now, however, I have him here at my house in Katounakia...he came to me and asked me to make him a monk; and I accepted him and did it. Likewise my mother became a nun.'<sup>14</sup> However, at 18 years old, when Evangelos left school, his monastic vocation was not apparent to him. His decision to depart from the world was made when he was convinced that God was preventing him from establishing himself professionally in it, for on leaving school Evangelos failed to make headway in anything he set his mind on. This remarkable catalogue of providential setbacks which precipitated Evangelos' renunciation of the world is listed by his biographer in this way:

Initially he sat the examination to become a postman. It seems he needed to know someone on the inside which he didn't so he failed...Later he tried to become a policeman but he was told that that year the police were not taking anyone on. Finally he prepared for and took the examination to join the air force. After his medical check-up the doctors wrote on his card: "Rapid heartbeat. Unsuitable"... He decided in the end to do his military service so as to at least fulfil that obligation. There too, however, he was not accepted. The ulcers which had formed on his leg due to his allergy obliged the military doctors to give him a two year deferment...He was persuaded that God was showing him the way to the Holy Mountain'.

His mother also saw a dream of a venerable elder saying to her that in the place where her son was now going he would succeed.<sup>15</sup>

Evangelos Papanikitas arrived at Katounakia three months before his 21st birthday, in September 1933, obedient as he saw it to the will of God manifest in the reality of the circumstances of his life. Katounakia is on the tip of the Athonite peninsular. It is on the steep slopes of a stony ravine and is sparsely populated by 14 hermitages, dependencies of the monastery of Great Lavra. In 1933 Evangelos would have had to get there by row boat from Daphne, passing by the monasteries and sketes on the south side of the peninsular, and alight on a designated slab of rock and then climb 250 metres along a narrow path spiralling up the ravine to the hermitage of St Ephraim the Syrian. Here he found the elders he knew from his village. Evangelos became a monk in 1934, taking the name Logginos, and two days later the most elderly of the inhabitants of the hermitage died, Old Ephraim. Hieromonk Nikiphoros, took leadership of the hermitage and gave this recently reposed elder's name to Fr Logginos when he took the Great Schema in 1935, and so he became known as Fr Ephraim of Katounakia. From September 1933 he would briefly leave the Holy Mountain to be ordained in 1936. But from 1936 he did not leave the Mountain for 38 years until 1974, when he was taken to Thessalonica to

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.206.

<sup>15</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, Publication of the Holy Hesychasterion of St Ephraim, Katounakia, Mt Athos (in Greek) p.22.

hospital to be treated for severe food poisoning. When his siblings came to visit him at that time he had no idea who they were.<sup>16</sup>

Elder Ephraim was on the Holy Mountain for a total of 65 years. He took his own disciples for the last 25 of these, meaning that for forty years he was a monk under obedience. To this fundamental feature of monasticism, obedience, he was wholeheartedly devoted. Such was his love of obedience that his spiritual brother and biographer, Elder Joseph of Vatopedi, would have him known rather as Elder Ephraim ‘the Obedient’ (ο υποτακτικός) than ‘of Katounakia’.<sup>17</sup> Submission and obedience summed up the struggle and content of his life and provided the main theme of his teaching.<sup>18</sup> He would often repeat ‘Obedience is life; disobedience is death.’<sup>19</sup> Elder Ephraim, who ‘excelled with exacting diligence’<sup>20</sup> in his submission to his Elders, soon became the manifestation of the perfect disciple,<sup>21</sup> which was always the starting point for the great spiritual directors,<sup>22</sup> the ones who succeeded ‘best in securing the sacrifice of [the] *voluntis propria* (self-will).’<sup>23</sup>

While nobody can follow Christ and not practise obedience, in the monastery it is observed to a degree that is impossible in the world. It is the cornerstone of the ascetic life. All spiritual progress is built up on the foundation of obedience. When obedience is lost all the virtues and gifts dependent on it vanish too. Emphasising this point, Elder Ephraim would say bluntly, ‘If you’ve been obedient, you’ll go to Paradise, if you haven’t been obedient you can receive communion and serve the Liturgy all you like but you’re destined for hell.’<sup>24</sup> To a monk saddened that his duties in the monastery encroached on his prayer life, the Elder advised, ‘You are not rooted in obedience. Myself I don’t make sure I pray, I make sure I am obedient... We are here to be obedient, not to pray. Obedience.’<sup>25</sup>

In this insistence on obedience Elder Ephraim was voicing the teaching of his own Elder and of the Fathers down the ages. What Elder Joseph passed down to them, he said, as the first thing, although he was a great hesychast, was not noetic prayer but obedience, the cenobitic life.<sup>26</sup> For Gregory the Great (Dialogos), the same insistence on obedience as the root of all else is made: ‘To be sure the single virtue is obedience which implants the other virtues in the mind, and protects the ones that have been implanted.’<sup>27</sup> So the idea of ‘the uselessness of every virtue outside of obedience... became an indisputable maxim of cenobitism.’<sup>28</sup>

Obedience is called a ‘mystery’ or ‘sacrament’ by Elder Joseph of Vatopedi, and as a young man Elder Ephraim was not slow to grasp its significance.<sup>29</sup> The obedience of the disciple is modelled on the obedience of Christ who, in order to refashion humanity, ‘demonstrated perfect and exact obedience to the will of His Father’. As disobedience led to the fall and the distortion of

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p.88.

<sup>17</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p 32.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p 59: ‘The actions and words of blessed Elder Ephraim, his entire life, his intent, and his goal were submission and obedience.’

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.53.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.32.

<sup>21</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.61.

<sup>22</sup> See Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Cistercian Studies Series 116, p.170.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.165.

<sup>24</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, pp.163 and 211-12, where, if you have been disobedient the Jesus prayer and holy communion cannot help you, only obedience.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.168.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.161.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted by Hausherr, p.259.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.208, cf. p.164: there is no virtue without self denial, no conformity to the will of God without sacrifice of own will and no charity without uprooting of perverse self-will (*filavtia*).

<sup>29</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.53.

the will of man and the darkening of his mind, so obedience, after the example of Christ, is the way of restoration.<sup>30</sup> The obedient disciple loses his life, crucifying his logical mind, learning to die in order to live.<sup>31</sup> Obedience is the path that leads the disciple from the slavery of the passions and self-will to the freedom of the children of God.<sup>32</sup> This is because its characteristic is to cultivate humility and contrition, which bring the heart to the surface where prayer is born, ‘the source of Grace, of tears, of divine illumination’.<sup>33</sup> When the monk lays down at the feet of Christ his free will and his reason, in return for this sacrifice he is given knowledge of the will of God, which is the gift of spiritual fatherhood.<sup>34</sup>

How was the young novice Evangelos Papanikitas initiated into the life of obedience at Katounakia? When he arrived there Katounakia was and largely still is a literal desert. In the 1930s there was no water except what the monks collected in cisterns in the winter months, which then was drawn and carried by hand. There were no trees and still today not much grows there amidst the abundance of rock and stone. Into this harsh physical environment came the young novice from his family hearth and experienced with his Elders also a kind of spiritual aridity. There were the church services and the handiwork (mending clothes at first and then making prosphora seals), and the errands to the sea and into the mountains. And he had to cook and clean as the only young man of an ageing brotherhood. His soul, however, as he put it, required ‘something more, something higher than this’,<sup>35</sup> so he did not find solace in the first years at Katounakia. The novice’s obedience was put to the test by his Elders’ hard words. The leader of the brotherhood, Old Elder Ephraim was ‘demanding, strict and scathing beyond measure’<sup>36</sup> and Hieromonk Nikiphoros was ‘domineering and demanding’.<sup>37</sup> The young novice vigilantly guarded his heart as his ego was assaulted by their insults. He would patiently contain himself and answer their criticisms about his lack of manual skills and the uselessness of his education in his new environment by accepting them: ‘Forgive me, Elder, by your prayers I will learn.’<sup>38</sup> He did not give in to his thought, as he remembered later, to answer back with ‘I finished high school and I am not a blockhead like you.’<sup>39</sup>

Instead of giving in to this thought to express a proud opinion, he controlled himself and used this chastening experience to his advantage. He observed the seductive forces that raised their head as he compared himself as one educated with his illiterate elders, and recognised in them their destructive effects.<sup>40</sup> Dealing with the chastening of his elders in this way by crucifying his mind, the novice proved the truth of the saying ‘Nothing is as useful to a beginner as an insult. The beginner who bears insults is like a tree that is watered every day.’<sup>41</sup> Accepting the insults with obedience and patience, Fr Ephraim was given, and took, the opportunity to turn to God and offer to Him with a good conscience the purity of his intentions to follow the life of renunciation he had chosen.

---

<sup>30</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.162: ‘Whoever practises obedience becomes an imitator of Christ.’

<sup>31</sup> See Achimandrite Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart in the Theology of Saint Silouan the Athonite and Elder Sophrony of Essex*, p.206.

<sup>32</sup> *Spiritual Direction in the Christian East*, p.168: ‘The only *raison d’être* of spiritual fatherhood is to lead from the stage of slavery to the freedom of the children of God.’

<sup>33</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.103.

<sup>34</sup> See *The Enlargement of the Heart*, p.226, and *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.163: ‘God is obliged to bless he who imitates Him,’

<sup>35</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.41.

<sup>36</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.29.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p.65.

<sup>38</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.37.

<sup>39</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.29.

<sup>40</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.37 (Rom. 7:23).

<sup>41</sup> Abba Isaiah, quoted by Hausherr pp.74-75.

Because of the purity of his disposition to follow the way of obedience and humility, and his refusal to assert his own will the young novice had ‘the support of Grace that would console him’.<sup>42</sup> In these early days, his biographer remarks, his lack of experience in the spiritual life was made up for by the purity of his intentions:

Elder Ephraim pointed out to us that Divine Grace comforted him and protected him solely due to his pure intention to please God by doing His will. And with one simple little prayer, for whatever the occasion required, the answer would be immediate. ‘O Mistress of the world and our true Mother, will you let me fall into deception or danger, seeing as I place my hope in thee and implore thee?’ Before he would even finish this little intercession he would have a complete answer, and his joy would be ineffable.<sup>43</sup>

Although for five years his thoughts tempted him to leave Katounakia,<sup>44</sup> he did not yield to them and took not one step in that direction,<sup>45</sup> but entrusted himself in the way we have seen to the care of the Panagia whom he believed had guided him there, and so resolved to remain there to the end. For victory over his thoughts, Elder Ephraim later on took no credit: ‘God enlightened me and I remained with the elders living in patience,’ he said.<sup>46</sup> We have a sense of the intensity of his temptations as his biographer sums up this first period: ‘Thus learning, with forbearance, and obedience, struggling with difficulties from within and from without he began his monastic life.’<sup>47</sup>

From the very start of his novitiate, it can be seen that inextricably linked with obedience and spiritual direction is the struggle of non-reliance on one’s own fallen ways of thinking. Thoughts, Elder Ephraim taught, are the content of a monk’s life and by the nature of the thoughts he entertains, he either progresses or regresses. They represent the barometer of his spiritual state.<sup>48</sup> Thoughts, he said to his disciples, are the first obstacle met in the struggle for obedience because to be obedient requires precisely the disciple not to believe in his own thoughts, in what seems to him to be good and reasonable. This effort, to accept chastening and not to justify oneself is a great lesson of obedience as it puts to the test, as we saw above the intentions of the novice.<sup>49</sup> Outside of ‘casting yourself down’ in this way, which is ‘no easy feat’, Elder Ephraim told his own following, ‘There is no other way to proceed.’<sup>50</sup> This is because it is the way of humility, which escapes the snares of the devil because he is unable to follow it, and attracts the Grace of God. This is why, in a homily at the tonsuring of a monk, Elder Ephraim asks the candidate rhetorically ‘Are you ready to throw yourself down at the feet of the brethren saying “forgive me”, whether you are right or wrong? Are you able to pronounce the blessed words “forgive me” at which the demons tremble and are afraid and which abolishes their power?’<sup>51</sup> When a person has succeeded in vanquishing the ego by not believing in himself, he is compared by Elder Ephraim to the greatest great martyr and trophy bearer before God.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.36.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p.41.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p.34.

<sup>45</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.182.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p.37.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p.30.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p.188: ‘The thoughts are reckoned. From our thoughts we can become useless and from our thoughts we can become better. The monk doesn’t have actions he has thoughts.’ Cf. p.188, where a nun, by her thoughts, is reckoned to be in church, although she is out looking after sheep, and an elder, by his thoughts, is reckoned to be outside of church, although he is inside.

<sup>49</sup> Cf Archimandrite Zacharias, *The Hidden Man of the Heart*, Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex, 2007, p.202.

<sup>50</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.162.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p.296.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p.190.

Elder Ephraim supplies many examples in his teaching to persuade his disciples of the destructive, divisive effects of harbouring bad thoughts and not obediently disclosing them to the elder. One brother's unconfessed thought literally separated him from communion with God. His thought told him that Elder Ephraim, who was due to come to give him Holy Communion, was going to take a crumb of ordinary bread, soak it in wine and then communicate that to him: the result was that the Elder repeatedly forgot to set aside a portion of the divine communion for him after each Liturgy and then, at a loss, deciding to use the reserved sacrament, he could not lift out small particle for the brother.<sup>53</sup> It is undisclosed thoughts, Elder Ephraim taught, that slowly separate a disciple from his elder.<sup>54</sup> And when Fr Ephraim had a thought that something his Elder Joseph had written in a letter had not been expressed correctly, Elder Joseph, aware that something was not as it should be, said to Fr Ephraim, 'Papa, be careful, some thought has come between you and me.'<sup>55</sup> So Elder Ephraim advised his following: 'Do you have a thought? Tell it to your Elder. And however God enlightens your Elder, you listen to him. Don't believe your own thought. The devil is not in a hurry. Slowly but surely he will take you where he wants to.'<sup>56</sup>

'The work of *hesychia* is this unconcern for all things,' says St John Climacus and 'this is why submission to the spiritual father constitutes the indispensable preparation for the hesychastic life.'<sup>57</sup> So the delivering over of the will to an elder enables the disciple to be free from care and this brings him peace.<sup>58</sup> The disclosure of thoughts and obedience in general therefore is a preparation for hesychia: it deprives the devil of the means by which he can attack and frees the mind to be concentrated on prayer, especially the 'one-thought prayer', which is pleasing to God.<sup>59</sup> 'I must not hide even completely laughable things from the elder', says Fr Ephraim, 'so as not to provide the devil a place to build on top of me.'<sup>60</sup> It follows also that the more simply a hesychast lives, the less his mind opens to new things, the more his prayer is facilitated.<sup>61</sup>

Because he sincerely sought to find the grace of God and obeyed his elders with love and a humble disposition, even from his first years as a monk Fr Ephraim was praying with floods of tears, indicative of a soul touched by divine love. But in his spiritual experiences of the grace of God he was longing to know whether he was on the right path. His experiences would make him wonder, 'Now what is that? Whom can I ask?'<sup>62</sup> He said of his elder, 'Old Nikiphoros was a good man, but he couldn't teach you about a way that he himself hadn't travelled.'<sup>63</sup> Fr Ephraim was

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. pp.164-7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p.181.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p.44.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid pp.181-2; cf. also *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.175, quoting St Theodore the Studite, who believed '*exagoreusis* was the best sign of humility': 'I exhort you to let the secrets of the heart be known, according to the word of Scripture. For it is impossible for a plant not to perish when it is being slowly eaten by the worm inside, or for a soul that is hiding a serpent (something undisclosed) not to decay or, filled with worms, not to end in total corruption. I abjure each of you to reject the gnawer concealed in you.'

<sup>57</sup> *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.245.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid p.168, quoting Saint Ammonas; cf. p.245, quoting Dorotheos and *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.161: 'If you are afraid you have self-will within you', and p.164: 'If a brother says to you "Can you come here and help me father?" reply, "Let it be blessed." Follow that way and you'll see how you feel within you. What peace, what tranquillity you'll feel!'

<sup>59</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, pp.199-200.

<sup>60</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.155.

<sup>61</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.280: 'I don't want to open communication with many people. I am a hermit - I am a hesychast...I am going to lose the peace, the tranquility - the simplicity of my quietness.' See also p.109: 'He was insistent in following his own advice "Do not open up new fields", by which he meant the avoidance by the monks of new things, ideas, or concerns since these divert the mind and impede spiritual progress.' See also pp.111-12: 'The Elder was never preoccupied with concern for things. Very few things were significant to him.'

<sup>62</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.34.

<sup>63</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.41-2.

yearning for a spiritual guide. He would say later on, 'To leave the world is easy; for someone to find a guide, is very difficult! It's difficult.'<sup>64</sup> We easily get a sense of the petition of Fr Ephraim's soul for spiritual direction and its deprivation of the same in his early days as a monk with the account of his first meeting with Elder Joseph the Hesychast, who lived further up the mountain side at St Basil's, where they would go sometimes for the Liturgy. When Elder Joseph asked simply: 'Is Ephraim obedient?' (to which Fr Nikiphoros replied, 'He is, he is'), this is how monk Ephraim describes his feelings: 'At that moment I wanted to fall down and kiss the feet of Old Joseph because at last I had heard a spiritual word...Everyone else used to ask "Is the new monk intelligent? Is he hard working? Does he take to the handiwork well?"'<sup>65</sup> 'I felt that within this elder there was life and grace, because I hadn't heard this question before from anyone else.'<sup>66</sup> Fr Ephraim found in Elder Joseph a point of reference at last for his spiritual life. Elder Joseph sealed with his word the spiritual experience of Fr Ephraim and confirmed him on his path, saying, 'You carry on and I will follow you and look after you; with tears you found grace, with tears continue.'<sup>67</sup> From that time on Fr Ephraim called him his Elder and, with the blessing of Fr Nikiphoros, who had no objection to his new found association with Elder Joseph, four times a week he would celebrate the Liturgy at St Basil's, making the half hour climb up there at midnight.<sup>68</sup>

The Elder has to 'enable' his disciple to pursue obedience and cut his own will, which 'stands as a brass wall between man and God'.<sup>69</sup> Feeling 'there was life and grace' in Elder Joseph, Fr Ephraim freely delivered his life into his hands, and sacrificed to him, as to God, his own judgement and opinion, submitting to him in everything. In order to enable the disciple to pursue obedience and follow after him, the Spiritual Guide must inspire this trust. To be a guide, the spiritual father needs to have reached the place where others want to be led; to reconcile others he needs to be reconciled himself with God. It has been suggested that it is trust that comes first in the 'hierarchy of causes that make the spiritual father-son relationship so effective...as everything depends on it', and Elder Ephraim, recognising the spiritual character of his future director which this faith presupposes,<sup>70</sup> 'gave himself up to obedience to Elder Joseph and to his love,' his biographer writes, 'with all his guileless heart. With joy he accepted his guidance. He exposed his thoughts and spiritual state to him without dissimulation.'<sup>71</sup> With trust and love for his Elder, he shouldered the yoke of obedience willingly and gratefully. Having found his elder, Fr Ephraim had found his life. Elder Joseph permitted him to keep and increase the grace he had found<sup>72</sup> and Fr Ephraim called Elder Joseph his 'life-saver'.<sup>73</sup> So his biographer tells us that willingly Elder Ephraim would make his nocturnal journeys up the mountain to serve the Liturgy at St Basil's and that gratefully he would double up his duties to serve both his own and Elder Joseph's brotherhood, a feat he managed 'by his love and obedience'.<sup>74</sup>

Elder Ephraim's love and obedience were not reserved only for his adopted Elder Joseph. His obedience for his Elder Nikiphoros was not a formality devoid of love, but true obedience. He

---

<sup>64</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.182.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p.37.

<sup>66</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.47.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p.46.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* pp.39-40.

<sup>69</sup> Abba Poemen, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, quoted p.172.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p.260.

<sup>71</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.42.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p.47.

<sup>73</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.59.

<sup>74</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, pp.42-3.

obeyed him ‘out of love and with godly zeal’.<sup>75</sup> For Elder Ephraim, obedience is synonymous with love.<sup>76</sup> This he demonstrated particularly powerfully, given the general consensus that Fr Nikiphoros was a hard man, when he took care of this elder in the last years of his life when he was sick and suffering from amnesia. Elder Ephraim’s disciple, on a visit to the hermitage, describes his and his companions’ surprise at the demonstration of tender love which must always have been the inspiration of Fr Ephraim’s obedience to his difficult elder Nikiphoros:

We had heard of grandfather’s difficult character and the patience and the tough obedience which Elder [Ephraim] had shown in days gone by and we thought he was looking after the sick man out of a formal sense of duty because there was no one else at the hermitage. So we were astonished when we saw the love, but more than that the tenderness, with which he attended to him. He fed him, he cleaned him, he changed his clothes, he read the services to him – grandfather of course was completely deaf but he took part repeating out loud the prayer which he saw written in big letters on a piece of card ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.’ The most grave and noble Fr Ephraim would play with him tenderly as he might with a child.<sup>77</sup>

We are told that one of the most severe letters Elder Ephraim ever wrote was elicited by one of his spiritual children, who had suggested when Fr Nikiphoros had finally died that Elder Ephraim could now at last have some respite from the troubles Fr Nikiphoros gave him.<sup>78</sup> Fr Ephraim had wept in his prayer for his elder when he had been informed in his heart of the illness about to afflict him, and when it arrived, he prayed that God would allow the disease to leave his elder and come upon him. He did not leave him for a moment and even fulfilled the sick man’s rule of prayer for him. Fr Nikiphoros is described by others as difficult and at times intolerable, but on his elder Nikiphoros’ death, Fr Ephraim writes to a spiritual child in Thebes: ‘...with a body without a soul I write you this letter of mine. My Elder – my good Elder has now fallen asleep. We buried him yesterday evening. Be so good as to inform his relatives.’<sup>79</sup> Elder Ephraim gave himself entirely to praying for the repose of his soul which, some six months after his death, he was ‘informed’ was saved,<sup>80</sup>

In calling his Elder his life-saver, Elder Ephraim was not exaggerating. By virtue of his spiritual bond with his Elder, the disciple finds deliverance from the evil one, freedom from fear and purification, as this saying of Elder Ephraim implies: ‘What an Elder is only the devil knows...because his strength is abolished.’<sup>81</sup> ‘You make a prostration and go where you like.’<sup>82</sup> You confess a thought and the soul is cleansed.’<sup>83</sup> The disciple is protected by his obedience to the Elder from the attacks of the enemy, but equally he is exposed and vulnerable when he shows disobedience. So when demons were appearing to a disciple and accusing him hours before his death saying that his soul belonged to them and that they would be returning the next day to take him, his Elder told him to tell them: ‘I have an Elder’, which he did and they instantly vanished. But equally, when an audacious disciple of Elder Ephraim had spoken to him with shameless disrespect, he suffered as he was trying to sleep from an intense demonic attack. Elder Ephraim said:

He came terrified into my cell and said: ‘Elder such and such is happening to me; save me.’ Then I said to him: ‘That is what happens when somebody behaves badly to his Elder and grieves him.’

---

<sup>75</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.164.

<sup>76</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.103.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p.60.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* pp.84-5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p.86.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* pp.177-8.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p.177: ‘Make a prostration, kiss the hand of your Elder and go and become an astronaut on the moon; don’t be afraid, because the blessing protects you, obedience protects you.’

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* p.64.

Then I read him a prayer and everything left him, all the demonic energy. Afterwards he left and slept peacefully.<sup>84</sup>

The presence of the power of God in the Elder/disciple relationship<sup>85</sup> would make Fr Ephraim speaking of his Elder Joseph to declare, 'I never loved nor feared more any person in the world.'<sup>86</sup> This power stems not only from the Elder's closeness to Christ, but also from the reverence and trust of the disciple, which St Gregory Palamas says 'ascends to Christ and to the Holy Spirit'.<sup>87</sup> The Elder who 'has his heart stripped by repentance and continuous standing before God'<sup>88</sup> can speak the word of God for the edification and inspiration of his disciples who trust and honour him. Fr Ephraim teaches: 'The Elder spoke, God spoke. The mouth of the Elder is the mouth of Christ.'<sup>89</sup> Fr Ephraim's disciple and biographer remembers Fr Ephraim speaking of his relationship with Elder Joseph and relates:

Their spiritual bond was so authentic, strong and deep, and the spiritual state of Old Joseph so great, that God sealed his word. Many times leaving for Katounakia he would kiss his hand and ask his blessing. 'Go,' his Elder would say from his heart, gesturing with his hand, 'Go and you will see.' 'I was richly blessed with prayer and grace,' Fr Ephraim remembered with uplifted soul. [But at other times] 'Go on with you, be off with you now,' he would say to him harshly when he had saddened him in something. 'Dryness and abandonment,' Fr Ephraim bitterly remembered and confessed.<sup>90</sup>

Given the sacred bond between disciple and Elder (the Elder is even described as 'God made visible'<sup>91</sup>), it is not surprising that Elder Ephraim was always calling on the blessing of Elder Joseph<sup>92</sup> and taught others to do the same with their elders. He would appeal characteristically to 'The God of my Elder Joseph'.<sup>93</sup> This reminds me of St Nestoros, who called on 'the God of Demetrios' before defeating Luaios in the stadium. And one of Elder Joseph's disciples used to say to him, 'Elder, myself I have not seen God, I have seen you.'<sup>94</sup> After his Elder's death, Fr Ephraim would often see Elder Joseph in his dreams. On one occasion, he relates, 'I went and kissed him. He said to me "I am your Elder." You see? Not only here when he lives here, but also in heaven where he is that spiritual bond exists.'<sup>95</sup>

Commenting on the saying of St Athanasios, 'God is charity, and the one who possesses charity possesses God', Hausherr asserts that the first quality of the Spiritual Father is charity, or love, for God and neighbour and so 'all spiritual direction consists in bringing another close to God through charity',<sup>96</sup> Love (the first fruit of the Spirit [Gal. 5:22]), which attracts the disciple and brings him close to God, is a product of the prayer of the Elder that unites his soul with God and embraces the whole of creation in its bounds. Elder Ephraim expressed this simply saying,

---

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, pp.173-4.

<sup>85</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.32. See also *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.176, quoting Mt 10:41: 'He who receives you receives me.'

<sup>86</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.39. Cf. Isidore priest of Nitria, quoted in *Christian Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.212: 'The disciples must love their spiritual masters as fathers, and they should respect them as leaders, in such a way that their love does not slacken their fear and their fear does not obscure love.'

<sup>87</sup> St Gregory Palamas. quoted in *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.213.

<sup>88</sup> *The Enlargement of the Heart*, p.166.

<sup>89</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.176. Cf. *The Hidden Man of the Heart*, p.33: 'If we are humble we can make anybody a prophet, because if we approach with a humble heart and trust, then God will speak to us.'

<sup>90</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.44.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* p.293.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* pp.178-9.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* p.43.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* p.45.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* p.178.

<sup>96</sup> *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.57. Cf. *Obedience is Life*, p.30, where the goal of the monastic life is 'an all-embracing love for God' and this was the first lesson passed on by Elder Joseph to his disciples.

‘The result of hesychia is to see others as angels.’<sup>97</sup> In another place he says, ‘The first thing that prayer brings is joy. You feel like a prince. Then you are enriched in tears. You want to embrace the whole world both animate and inanimate. All people seem like angels to you.’<sup>98</sup>

He embraced his disciples’ life in his own and carried them in his prayer: ‘For so many years unceasingly he gave advice, pleaded, reproved and watched over his disciples’ spiritual progress.’<sup>99</sup> ‘He literally sacrificed himself’ and

to see his following gave him joy...a profound delight arose within him when he saw them united and showing love to one another...He struggled for them in so many ways which he had never even imagined before but chiefly he fought with his favourite weapons, prayer and tears. He struggled to help them according to God’s will, to accommodate them, to advance them in virtue, in spiritual things and chiefly to teach them obedience and prayer.<sup>100</sup> Innumerable times he got completely worn out but he never yielded. Not once did he lower the standard of paternal love even to think of sending someone away.<sup>101</sup>

Indeed Elder Ephraim exclaimed that his paternal love for his disciples was immeasurable and that he would willingly lay his life down to see them in Paradise.<sup>102</sup> This is the stance of the authentic spiritual guide who is, as St Gregory Nazianzus says, ‘the guardian of divine love towards humanity’.<sup>103</sup> Only to look upon their elder inspired the love of his disciples, as this quotation reveals:

Once he said the dismissal prayer at the end of the Liturgy and raised his eyes which were usually lowered. ‘Why are you looking at me?’ he asked the brother who was alone chanting with him. ‘I just am,’ he answered him simply. However he was avidly endeavouring to take his fill of that most beautiful, graceful, radiant countenance, full of sweet illumination and perfect purity. His gaze, the look on his face then, in the early years, before it was marked with old age, was like that of an eagle. It cut through you to the innermost depths of your soul.<sup>104</sup>

However, a spiritual father’s charity is demonstrated not only in patience and clemency but also benevolent severity.<sup>105</sup> So he would sharply rebuke a monk and not forgive him if he was knowingly doing his own will,<sup>106</sup> but also, for example, would not allow much laughter and any manifestations of affection were strictly prohibited. A disciple who called him ‘dear old Elder’ (*gerontako*) instead of Elder was punished with many prostrations.<sup>107</sup> The spiritual guides of the past with discernment tested their disciples to their limits treating them with different degrees of severity as the love and strength of spirit of the disciple could withstand in order to put to death the old man with his corrupt and sinful ways.<sup>108</sup> Because of the dangers of inherent in this process of extreme mortification, it is hardly practised any more. Severity is always, however, necessary from the Spiritual Guide, who, notwithstanding his rebukes, never ceases praying for the

---

<sup>97</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.105.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* pp.113-14.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* p.102.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* p.100. The first words of Elder Ephraim to his newly established brotherhood in 1981 were of a practical nature. They had to watch out for the cold Athonite draughts and should always carry with them an extra vest into which to change immediately if they had sweated. ‘Who would have dared pick up single-handedly a sack of cement? It had to be two of them however inconvenient it was. He went to great lengths in order to take care of them. When moving earth with the shovel he forbade them, especially the less strong, to completely fill it and would shout “half, half a shovel”.’

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* pp.98-9.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* p.179.

<sup>103</sup> *Spiritual Direction in the Christian East*, p.71.

<sup>104</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.120-1.

<sup>105</sup> *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.60.

<sup>106</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.187.

<sup>107</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.102.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, pp. 5-6.

chastised disciple in order to preserve the disciple from pride and inspire contrition and a humble disposition, which attracts Grace.<sup>109</sup> Elder Joseph, on one occasion that is recorded, banished Fr Ephraim from his presence for three days. Something he had done had embittered the Elder and Fr Ephraim asked for forgiveness. ‘Go,’ Elder Joseph said to him, ‘and don’t come here until I send for you.’ When the Elder called him back, Fr Ephraim, after days of spiritual barrenness, was visited by grace in the Liturgy. Reporting this to Elder Joseph, the elder confirmed his love for him: ‘My child, you mean you didn’t understand that I was in spirit embracing you and kissing you?’<sup>110</sup>

Although Elder Nikiphoros genuinely appreciated Fr Ephraim’s gifts,<sup>111</sup> it would appear difficult to maintain that his elder’s harshness was advised or deliberate in order for Fr Ephraim to preserve these gifts and for his greater spiritual profit. However, at the end of his life, Elder Nikiphoros finally gave Fr Ephraim his wholehearted blessing, having toiled in obedience to him for forty years. He ‘lifted his hands up high and shouted to his disciple: “May God bless you, may God bless you. You are not a man, you are an angel.”’<sup>112</sup> Interestingly an episode remarkably similar to this, where love in the form of severity was the most likely the explanation for the coldness in the Elder/Disciple relationship, describes the last words of Abba Ammonas to his disciple, a certain young John, who, like Fr Ephraim, was also a Theban and who was also called ‘not a man but an angel’ only on his deathbed:

Young John the Theban, a disciple of Abba Ammonas, took care of this ailing old man for twelve years. Though the old man saw him toiling, he never said a kind or gentle word to him. But when he died, in the presence of the other men, he took his hand and said three times, ‘Be saved. Be saved. Be saved.’ Then he assigned him to the old men, saying, ‘This is not a man, but an angel.’<sup>113</sup>

Elder Ephraim’s angelic life was the fruit of his unyielding persistence and the precision with which he kept to the monastic daily programme. He would say to his following: “We came here for this, for Vespers, the prayer rule, for Matins, Compline. If we neglect these or do half of what we should with a thousand excuses, then why should we stay here?” He was uncompromising first and foremost with himself. If for some serious reason he left out some prayers with the prayer rope, he considered it a debt which he repaid the next day.’<sup>114</sup> This insistence on keeping to the monastic rule was itself a work of obedience which Elder Joseph had impressed upon his disciples. Fr Ephraim ‘maintained a rigour of conscience often to the level of self-sacrifice’<sup>115</sup> and his life was characterised by painstaking diligences becoming an elder to himself and an example to his disciples. ‘His presence alone would rouse the heedless and stir them to vigilance.’<sup>116</sup> Elder Ephraim said the same of Elder Joseph: ‘Just the remembrance of him,’ he recollected, ‘would draw me away from errors and set me on the road to spiritual progress throughout my life.’<sup>117</sup> Indeed, Elder Ephraim set out to be like his Elder Joseph in every way possible. He ‘was wholeheartedly devoted to [him], not only by being obedient to his counsels, but also by imitating him, as much as this was possible’.<sup>118</sup> ‘If you counted the fervent and lively sayings of Papa-

---

<sup>109</sup> *The Enlargement of the Heart*, pp.169-70.

<sup>110</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.45.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* pp.61-2. Elder Nikiphoros, on a visit to his home town, once said to Fr Ephraim’s mother: ‘Do not ask Ephraim to come out into the world. He is a perfect disciple; he is very good. If he comes down here they will get hold of him and make him a priest straight away and he’ll lose the life he has on the Holy Mountain. Ephraim lives and sees Paradise from now.’

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* p.85.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted from *Vitae Patrum III in Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.75.

<sup>114</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.102.

<sup>115</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.54-5.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p.55.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* p.59.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* p.30.

Ephraim for the most part they were words, examples, counsels, visions, spiritual ways of Elder Joseph... He was a living replica of Old Joseph.<sup>119</sup> 'He tried to imitate Elder Joseph in vigils and in prayer, as much as their monastic program at Katounakia would allow.'<sup>120</sup> Elder Joseph emphasised the importance of preserving the initial zeal of the monk.<sup>121</sup> Elder Ephraim taught and practised the same. Zeal is greatest at the beginning of a monk's life, but his purpose should be to preserve it, if not increase it as time goes on: 'Blessed is the brother who preserves his zeal from the beginning to the end of his life,' he would say, 'Because you do not know how long you will live in the monastery.'<sup>122</sup>

Elder Ephraim taught saying 'force is commendable...without force there is no progress nor is there purification or vision or spiritual sensation'<sup>123</sup> and, 'When you yourself want salvation and you struggle hard with yourself then the outcome will be as you wish.'<sup>124</sup> He showed the measure of his zeal to obtain God's mercy and to keep a good conscience in the penance he made for having a slightly deprecatory thought about Elder Joseph, for which he repented and was forgiven. The penance, he said, was given to him by God. He confessed, 'For fifty years I've been going every time and making a prostration to Old Joseph, there where I first bowed down to him for the matter of my disobedience to him. That is at Little St Ann's, between the cistern and the three steps which lead to the rooms.'<sup>125</sup> Whether this penance was carried out daily, weekly or yearly is not clear from the text, but the example still illustrates well how the elder's zeal made him keep his sin ever before him in order to increase his contrition and humility and reap the rewards of repentance.

'If something is pricking your conscience,' Elder Ephraim taught, 'go and make a prostration: "My brother, please forgive me, I was wrong." That corrects your mistake. Do not ignore your conscience.'<sup>126</sup> Elder Joseph of Vatopedi writes: 'His life was a continuous martyrdom of conscience.'<sup>127</sup> His teaching was, however, primarily through his actions and not with words. So it is recorded that after getting annoyed trying to move an oil stove into the Church and replying to some remark of his disciple with the words 'in your bad old days', Elder Ephraim prostrated before him touching both hands to the floor and said: 'My child, forgive me. I said a bad word.'<sup>128</sup> In many instances, we see Elder Ephraim vigilantly obeying the promptings of his conscience to cast down his own self-will. One such famed instance is related by Elder Joseph of Vatopedi who, as he was leaving Katounakia, lent Elder Ephraim his pen (of the Bic variety) to write an address on an envelope: 'When he had finished, he admired my pen, because it seemed it wrote very nicely. So I told him to keep it for himself. He refused, but told me to buy him one like it. I promised him I would and that soon because the next day someone was leaving from New Skete for the outside.' Fr Joseph duly left for New Skete where he was living, but in the middle of the night heard a knock on the yard door and opened it to see, to his surprise, Elder Ephraim who said firmly: 'Joseph, please, don't order that pen that we spoke about because I didn't get a blessing from my Elder,' and he left immediately without another word. Fr Joseph goes on to explain that Fr Ephraim had walked two-and-a-half to three hours at midnight, not because his Elder had not blessed the purchase of a pen (his Elder was infirm and not compos

---

<sup>119</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.57.

<sup>120</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.61.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* p.157.

<sup>122</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.187.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* p.297.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* p.186.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* p.43.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* p.212.

<sup>127</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.207.

<sup>128</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, pp.108-9.

mentis), but in order not to indulge his self will.<sup>129</sup> As material goods are the usual means of satisfying man's own will,<sup>130</sup> Elder Ephraim was always extremely careful in his stance towards them.<sup>131</sup>

The Elder listened to the voice of his conscience and rejected all thoughts that told him to relax his rule. If his conscience was censuring him about something, he would ask forgiveness before celebrating the Liturgy.<sup>132</sup> He sought out justifications to increase his asceticism. When Fr Nikiphoros died, having donated the 500 sovereigns the elder had left for forty times forty Liturgies to be celebrated in his memory, for the sake of his elder's soul, Fr Ephraim increased by two-and-a-half hours the time he spent in prayer for the daily services.<sup>133</sup> Even in advanced old age at the end of his life, he made himself become thirsty by not drinking all day 'to maintain his diligence and asceticism, thereby preserving his original zeal'. A visiting monk wanted to bring him water.

No my child, don't bring me any. Countering this tempting thought, I bring to mind St John Chrysostom, who was marched in his exile towards Comana in the heat of the sun. He was ill, and they tormented him. He suffered from thirst because they wouldn't give him any water. And I shouldn't bear with a little thirst, sitting here undisturbed in my little cell? And believe me, I feel the grace of this great Father of ours to be near me. But don't say anything to my brotherhood, because they'll be upset.<sup>134</sup>

His words of encouragement to a friend in a letter are true of himself 'Don't think the martyrs are those only whose head was cut off once because they didn't deny Christ. There are others who don't renounce virtue or patience.'<sup>135</sup>

In the Elder-Disciple covenant prayer is the duty par excellence of the Elder for the disciple obedient to him – in order to bring the favour of God upon him for whom he stands before God as a guarantor of his salvation.<sup>136</sup> Elder Ephraim expresses this simply in the saying: 'Oh, how the Elder's soul is relieved when the disciple does obedience! Oh what rest it brings! Straight from the soul comes this relief together with the prayer, "My child may God bless you", and this prayer is heard.'<sup>137</sup> He also taught that, after obedience, prayer is the primary duty of the monk.<sup>138</sup> The greatest charismata of Elder Ephraim were prayer and spiritual tears.<sup>139</sup> Prayer was 'his conscious and subconscious desire'.<sup>140</sup> When he was awake, the attention of his mind was always concentrated in his heart in a state of prayer.<sup>141</sup> He had such a rich gift of prayer that it did not leave him as he slept<sup>142</sup> and his dreams were full of grace. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy every day<sup>143</sup> and the whole day before prepared himself for that event,<sup>144</sup> which he considered the 'most

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. p.10.

<sup>130</sup> *Christian Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.147.

<sup>131</sup> See *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.32.

<sup>132</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.190.

<sup>133</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.86.

<sup>134</sup> *Obedience is Life*, pp.181-2.

<sup>135</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.273.

<sup>136</sup> Abba Isaiah the Solitary, quoted in *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.145: 'Take care not to neglect the observance of my regulations... if you observe them secretly and openly I will give God an account for you.'

<sup>137</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.178.

<sup>138</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.133.

<sup>139</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.140.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. p.49.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. *ibid.* pp.199-200.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. p.48.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. p.119.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. pp.221-2.

important prayer of all'.<sup>145</sup> He taught that divine grace can be seen,<sup>146</sup> as this was his experience in the Liturgy at the consecration of the gifts. In an indescribable way, he was often completely 'caught up' by divine grace to experience eternal things so that he was not aware of his surroundings, which is indicative of the state of pure prayer and brings about total purification.<sup>147</sup> One such time, he fell silent as he served the Liturgy and Fr Nikiphoros found him fallen over the Altar table soaked in tears. Coming to himself at his proddings, he continued the Liturgy but afterwards he approached Fr Nikiphoros and said to him through his tears, 'Elder, your blessing. If it be blessed, if you see me again in such a state, leave me; don't shake me to bring me round. Today Elder... I came out of myself and I saw angels ascending and descending on the altar and they were singing. I was in an indescribable blessedness; I was beside myself.'<sup>148</sup> Describing a similar visitation of Grace in the Liturgy, and not able to proceed with the liturgical prayer, he explained: 'You become united with God! Your spirit with the Spirit. You are united! So then you cannot continue, particularly from the tears.'<sup>149</sup> 'You cannot restrain yourself,' he would say, 'when grace abundantly washes over you, then you lose control.'<sup>150</sup> As contemplation belongs to those who are pure,<sup>151</sup> and the gift of clear-sightedness depends on purity of soul, it is not surprising that Elder Ephraim was gifted with discernment<sup>152</sup> to the extent of *diorasis*<sup>153</sup> (vision through space or matter) and *proorasis*<sup>154</sup> (vision through time),<sup>155</sup> although these high degrees of spiritual insight were not always active in his soul.<sup>156</sup> Prayer, however, was always active<sup>157</sup> and it was strong<sup>158</sup> and the grace his prayer attracted was perceived by many as a strong, beautiful fragrance around him.<sup>159</sup>

The gift of prayer Elder Ephraim attributed to the intercessions of his own Elder Joseph who at times would embrace Fr Ephraim's head and place it on his chest as he prayed for him.<sup>160</sup> He

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. p.120.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. p.213.

<sup>147</sup> *The Enlargement of the Heart*, pp.122-3.

<sup>148</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.62; cf. p.204 and pp.214-15.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. p.204.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. p.214.

<sup>151</sup> *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.86.

<sup>152</sup> For discussion of discernment, see *ibid.* pp.77-98.

<sup>153</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.68: 'sees' stages in Father Prokopi's journey and time in Athens for his operation. Also p.154: he 'sees' in spirit that a priest serves the Liturgy well. Also p.92: as Elder Aimilianos leaves after meeting Elder Ephraim, the latter says, 'Let me pray a little to see what sort of a man he is.' He gestured with his hand 'that man my child is fragrance'. See also p.155: sometimes he used to say to us 'I will pray for God to tell me what you are.'

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. p.98: 'Today in the Liturgy, my child, I was informed that you are to be in my following and you will be my successor.' Cf. *Obedience is Life*, p.68: 'With his gift of clairvoyance he was informed not only who would be coming to stay with him, but also who would succeed him, and p.168, where he saw the earthquake before it struck Thessaloniki in 1978 and prayed for the effects of it to be less catastrophic than what he saw, which turned out to be the case. Also cf. *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.84, where it was revealed to Elder Ephraim that Elder Nikiphoros would become ill.

<sup>155</sup> *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.93.

<sup>156</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.140 and cf. pp.141-2: 'often he struggled in prayer for long periods of time so as to find out God's will on a specific matter that worried him...Whenever he was asked if he could find out God's will on a particular issue he confessed that it was neither easy, nor does God follow our will. Instead we follow God's will and He does as He pleases.'

<sup>157</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.125.

<sup>158</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.75. By prayer he saved his brother from prison and the death penalty and the city of Thessaloniki from the more devastating effects of an earthquake which he 'saw' was about to happen (see *Obedience is Life*, p.168).

<sup>159</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.66.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. p.42, and cf. p.106, where Elder Ephraim does the same with his disciple.

believed grace could be transmitted by prayer and from a distance and that if his prayer was going well, it was due to his Elder's prayer for him from above.<sup>161</sup> 'The Elder gave me the prayer rope; he gave me prayer.'<sup>162</sup> 'Two months I stayed close to Elder Joseph and I found grace.'<sup>163</sup> But prayer is primarily subject to obedience. He taught his disciples about finding prayer and grace saying that 'from obedience prayer is born'<sup>164</sup> and that, even if prayer is at first forthcoming, without obedience it will inevitably dry up.<sup>165</sup> 'Do you want to acquire prayer? Do you want, when you say "Lord Jesus Christ", rivers of tears to run from your eyes? Do you want to live the life of the angels? "Forgive me", "May it be blessed". Obedience.'<sup>166</sup>

This is so because as St Ammonas says, 'If a person does not cut off his own will, his heart cannot be affected.'<sup>167</sup> Obedience and the life of self denial that it entails affects and finds the heart by cultivating humility, compunction and tears, which concentrate the mind in the heart.<sup>168</sup> As well as concentrating the mind in the heart, spiritual tears purify the heart so that it becomes free and can love God alone in pure prayer. Elder Ephraim says, 'God wants from us a clean heart...God doesn't want company in our heart, he alone wants to reign. If we can achieve that, we can easily attain prayer of the heart.'<sup>169</sup> So, in the words of another Spiritual Guide, 'obedience principally concerns the heart of man, and its characteristic is to disclose the "deep heart"',<sup>170</sup> the centre of our being where we can meet God. If this is 'the purpose of all our labours as Christians',<sup>171</sup> we understand why obedience is so highly esteemed for spiritual life.

Elder Ephraim taught that prayer should always be accompanied by tears, which little by little we must augment. Tears he said are no more than a habit that once begun will continue and increase on their own.<sup>172</sup> Tears are important as they nourish and revitalise the soul and give wings to prayer.<sup>173</sup> They are so supportive of the one-thought-prayer of Jesus precisely because 'when we weep we can only have one thought'. Weeping during the Jesus Prayer means therefore that 'our entire mind is fixed on God'.<sup>174</sup> The elder himself reached the point where he could weep as much as he wanted at any time and in any place<sup>175</sup> and we are told furthermore that 'never throughout all the stages of his life could he endure an interruption in his prayer'.<sup>176</sup> For

---

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. pp.216 and 178

<sup>162</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.42.

<sup>163</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.40.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. p.112.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. pp.114 and 66. To make the point that a disciple's spiritual state is determined by his level of obedience, Elder Ephraim says, for example, that the light of divine Grace within us is reduced and increased dramatically according to our self-denial and respect for our Elder. He himself, he confesses, was one day in a grace-filled state of prayer occupied with making prosthoma seals, when his fellow struggler Fr Prokopi asked him to rekindle the fire and he thought to himself, 'Now that I have food to eat, let me take my fill and then afterwards I will tend to the fire.' That was it. The grace-filled state abandoned me immediately.'

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. p.162.

<sup>167</sup> *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, p.168.

<sup>168</sup> Cf *The Enlargement of the Heart*, p.151.

<sup>169</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.199 and cf. p.112: 'When the vessel of your heart is clean by itself the grace of God will fill it.'

<sup>170</sup> *The Enlargement of the Heart*, p.166.

<sup>171</sup> *The Hidden Man of the Heart*, p.194.

<sup>172</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, pp.232-3.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. p.234.

<sup>174</sup> *The Enlargement of the Heart*, p.122 and cf pp.218-19: '...when you have one thought for God, and you weep, that brings healing and unification of one's entire being, and raises man to such a level...as to be able to love God with all his heart, with all his mind, with his whole being.'

<sup>175</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.234, and p.34: 'I reached the point where I could weep whenever I wanted and for as long as I wanted.'

<sup>176</sup> *Obedience is Life*, p.125.

this reason, he had to limit the number of visitors he received. When he was challenged as to why he did not give a blessing to all those who made the effort to seek him out he replied,

I have such a spiritual state that I continuously ‘perceive’ God [so] ... I am hindered. Besides this ... God has granted me the gift of tears to such an acute degree that I often cannot contain myself [so] ... I made a supplication ... saying, ‘My Christ ... to all those who come here with such labour ... You Yourself give them of your Grace to satisfy them spiritually.’ I’ve seen for myself that the benevolent Lord in fact accepted my prayer.<sup>177</sup>

Those visitors he did receive he received with much love and comforted them deeply,<sup>178</sup> often speaking to them of events in their lives undisclosed by them and giving solutions to problems before he was asked.<sup>179</sup> In his last year he would receive visitors as he lay in bed. He would put his hands on them and pray.<sup>180</sup> One brother wrote, ‘I would often go to him with thoughts weighing me down heavy as lead. As soon as I saw him I became as light as cotton wool.’<sup>181</sup>

Elder Ephraim was able to give a word full of grace for the consolation and spiritual renewal of those near him because of the pain of his repentance, to which his manifold tears were witness,<sup>182</sup> and all his experience of affliction in his ascetic endeavour.<sup>183</sup> He suffered not only in his spirit but also in his body. From feeling abandoned by God in utter despair over his bodily ailment, the Elder, through his patience and the help of the Panagia, came to experience his eczema-related ulcerated leg as a gift of God’s love, a visitation through which he could return thanksgiving and praise to God who ‘took pain upon Himself and transformed it into a means of expressing his perfect love’.<sup>184</sup> He would write that God loves giving you sorrows<sup>185</sup> because it is these that contain a reward, and not joys,<sup>186</sup> and so our prayer should be for patience to endure them and not deliverance from them.<sup>187</sup> Elder Sophrony writes:

How awkward is the word of comfort in the mouth of one who himself has no experience of affliction, who himself has never struggled unto sweat let alone striven unto blood. But where one has experience of this kind, how great the wealth and power of his word! And a priest has need of such experience more than anyone, that is, he must have knowledge of life, even of the depths of hell. Of course, he must also know the Resurrection.<sup>188</sup>

It is written of Elder Ephraim that he was always ‘carrying the heavy burden of sorrows which were rewarded with exceptional heavenly gifts’.<sup>189</sup> His own words were: ‘I took my fill of the sweetest springs of Paradise and took care not to become conceited. I drank from the most bitter waters of hell, and was careful not to be swallowed up by despair.’<sup>190</sup>

Not all are called to the angelic monastic life, but all are invited to be obedient to the commandments of Christ, which lead to eternal life.<sup>191</sup> I think it is appropriate to end, therefore,

---

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p.170. See *The Hidden Man of the Heart*, quoting St Gregory Palamas, pp.191-2: ‘Those who are busy with their heart simply do not have the time to speak to anyone.’

<sup>178</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.134.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p.141.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. p.134.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. p.135.

<sup>182</sup> See *The Hidden Man of the Heart*, p.197.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. *The Enlargement of the Heart*, p. 167: ‘to be in a position to sense the interior world of each and every man who turns to him, it benefits [the spiritual father] to take continual refuge in God with a painful heart.’

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. p.147.

<sup>185</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.272.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. p.272.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. p.255.

<sup>188</sup> Quoted in *The Hidden Man of the Heart*, pp.200-1.

<sup>189</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.154.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. p.51. See also pp. 216-17, where the Elder speaks of Grace and then abandonment.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. *The Enlargement of the Heart*, p.241.

with the words of the Elder regarding his mother, who became nun only in her final illness. Writing to his sister on their mother's death, Elder Ephraim said:

My dear little sister, I cannot write to you in detail what it is I feel in my prayer for our Mother – just this one thing I'll say: I cannot call myself her child!!! And that soul my Mother. No, no. All the years that I have been sitting on these rocks in the desert have been for what I ask myself? I go to pray for her and my soul fills with joy: I forget all the sorrow that I have for her. I see her in infinite light, in joy – in delight. My soul leaps for joy.<sup>192</sup>

At her funeral, sweet-smelling myrrh like beads of sweat emanated from her body.<sup>193</sup> Elder Ephraim confessed:

Yes that is what happened and I felt I fell into a kind of resentment. There, I am confessing it. A woman, I am telling you, a peasant woman, illiterate, look where she reached! When I prayed for her I received, I didn't give! ... Many times [in my prayer] I saw that my mother is Elder Joseph, and Elder Joseph my mother. The two of them as one.... I saw that she had reached the same spiritual state as Elder Joseph.<sup>194</sup>

My mother had no example to follow; she was alone; she endured afflictions with patience.<sup>195</sup>

*Fr John Hookway*

\*\*\*\*\*

### **ARCHIMANDRITE BARNABAS (BURTON)**

My task is to introduce you to the work of someone who was a member of our Fellowship. He was known personally to several of you, and possibly known to others either by repute or from his short autobiography. I give some consideration to aspects of his life and some to his teaching as known to me and mainly as recorded in his writings.

My information on his life is based mainly on his autobiography, but also partly on other records that he kept and on the few snippets of information about him that can be found elsewhere (if you know where to look and what to look for). His autobiography had, in draft form, at least three titles. It started as 'Memories', then moved to 'Snakes and Ladders' (presumably because of the ups and downs of his life), and was published as *Strange Pilgrimage*, which reflected the wandering path he had taken.

He was born on 3 September 1915 in Pennal in North Wales, and died following a heart attack on 14 March 1996. His family were Welsh-speaking (despite their English surname) and he only learnt English when he started attending school (at the age of three). He was the third of five children. The first had died very young (in 1911), and the other three all died in middle age. His father served in the First World War, and returned at the end of that war with a severe problem with alcohol. Father Barnabas left school in 1931 (at the age of 16) with a school leaving certificate with passes in arts subjects but not in mathematics or sciences, and so university was then off the horizon. He continued to study Latin and Greek with the local rector and found work for a time as a gardener.

He grew up in a family that was religious and attended the Welsh language services at the Anglican church, although there was a period when his mother took them to the local Congregational church in the hope that the minister there might have some influence on his father

---

<sup>192</sup> *Gerontas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, p.243.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.* p.73.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* p.74.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

and his drinking problem. Father Barnabas records that he found their services extremely dreary in contrast to the much more colourful worship of the Anglican church.

His calling to a monastic life was a constant background to the first half of his adult life until he eventually made his profession as an Orthodox monk in 1960. In 1932 he set up a 'cell' in the garden of the family house, and continued to use it intermittently until 1943. Periodically, he created a copy of this cell where he was living at the time as a place of retreat. The last one was dismantled in September 1960. In 1933 he met an Anglican solitary nun (originally from the Community at Wantage), who had come to live in the same village as his grandfather. This made him aware of the existence of a monastic life within the Anglican Church, and she advised him to go to see Father William (Sirr), a former Franciscan (Society of the Divine Compassion), then living as a solitary at Glasshampton (near Worcester). Father William remained a strong influence on Father Barnabas throughout his life, and there are strong resonances between their lives. Father William was an Anglican priest, who had joined SDC working in a parish in the East End of London. Father William grew increasingly attracted towards a more monastic and contemplative form of life, and was eventually permitted to leave the community and try to start a monastic community at Glasshampton. He had a series of postulants over the years, but none stayed, and by the time Father Barnabas met him he had decided to remain as a solitary, being too old to deal with young novices, and sent postulants on to other established communities, mainly the Cowley Fathers in Oxford. He died in 1937 at the age of 85. Peter Anson (in *The Call of the Cloister*) gives a list of suggested reasons for Father William's failure to establish a community. Those who knew Father Barnabas will see the close parallels:

- (1) the SDC obstructed him until he was too old to be a pioneer;
- (2) he was no judge of character;
- (3) the office was recited with almost too prayerful slowness;
- (4) the food was bad, even by the standards of religious communities, and, in his later days at least, Fr William subsisted and expected others to subsist on really repellent messes (consisting largely of lentils) which were steamed and reheated for days on end. (p.199).

After visiting Father William in March 1933, Father Barnabas entered the Cowley Fathers as a postulant in September 1933, being clothed as a novice lay-brother three months later. Father Barnabas enjoyed being with educated men, and revelled in the library, devouring books on church history, and in the process discovering the Eastern Church. The Cowley Fathers then had a rigid division between the ordained Fathers and the Lay Brothers. To be an ordained Father one had to be ordained before joining the community. There was no route to ordination within the community. From his reading, Father Barnabas discerned that he wished to be a priest as well as a monk, and so he left at the end of 1934 in order to continue his education.

He returned home, and resumed the use of the garden 'cell' for recitation of parts of the divine office when he was at home. After consultation with the Rector he decided to seek admission to St David's College, Lampeter, which necessitated going back to school to complete the matriculation requirements. He started at Lampeter in October 1935 and completed his degree in Theology in 1938.

In January 1936 in his 'cell' he dedicated himself as a 'Solitary Brother of Jesus'. The records that he kept of the use of the 'cell' suggest that at least some of the services there were attended by family (mother, sisters and cousins) and friends (mostly female) who also made or gave various things to improve the 'cell' as a chapel. Some of these friends remained in regular contact until the end of his life.

During his time at Lampeter, he became more and more devoted to the ways of the Catholic wing of the Anglican Church. After graduating in June 1938 he went to Ely Theological College to complete his formal pre-ordination training, passing the necessary exams in September of the

same year, and was subsequently accepted for ordination as a Deacon in December 1938 to serve in an Anglo-Catholic parish in Colwyn Bay, in North Wales, a parish that was served by four clergy and a lay woman-worker. During his time at Ely, he also had his first direct contact with the Orthodox Church, when Nicholas Zernov visited to give a lecture.

His first vicar at Colwyn Bay had been a member of the Community of the Resurrection, but had left and married. Father Barnabas and one of his fellow curates did have serious discussions about the possibility of starting a monastic community in Wales, but this came to nothing. That curate later married, but, when his wife died, joined the Anglican Franciscans and did eventually move back to start a small community in Wales. The uncertain status of Catholic practices within the Anglican Church continued to cause problems for Father Barnabas and, with a change of vicar, he sought to move to a more Catholic parish after his ordination to the priesthood in December 1939, and was allowed to move to Buckley in April 1940. Here he was allowed to use as much Catholic Tridentine ritual as he could get away with, and being put in charge of a small 'mission' church within the parish meant that he could get away with a great deal. During this time, however, he also struggled with the question of whether he could remain within the Anglican Church, looking at the possibility of becoming a Roman Catholic.

In 1942 he became Minor Canon and precentor at Bangor Cathedral, which allowed him to make more use of his musical gifts. In 1944 he moved to a curacy at the most 'advanced' Anglo-Catholic parish in Wales, near Swansea, where he was put in charge of the daughter church and also acted as chaplain to a small community of nuns. Here he (and his fellow clergy) introduced more and more Roman practices, until complaints were made to the bishop and they were placed under discipline and forced to be less Roman.

In 1947, still seeking a monastic life, he spent some time with the Anglican Franciscans at Cerne Abbas, but found their life not congenial – too much emphasis on the manual labour and not enough on the spiritual work. Later that year, after a month at Walsingham, he became chaplain to a newly founded community of nuns, then living in the Bishop's Palace at Cuddesdon. This community subsequently became Benedictine nuns and moved to Burford. The six months he spent there were, according to his records, one of the happiest periods of his life. After a few months as chaplain at another convent near Aylesbury, he became temporary curate at Wantage. In November 1948 he was persuaded to return to his former parish near Swansea, still as a curate. In 1949, following the sudden death of the husband of his younger sister, he moved back to Wantage to live with her and help with her two young children. She and her children were Roman Catholics, and in 1950 Father Barnabas was received into the Roman Catholic Church. He then sought work as a teacher and obtained a post in a boarding school in Worthing.

He did not find life under Rome particularly congenial. The promulgation of the doctrine of the Bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary disturbed him, particularly as being something incompatible with the teaching of the undivided Church. On visits to London, he started attending services in the Russian and Greek churches. He spent a second year in teaching in a school run by the Dominicans in Wales. He still felt an urge towards a monastic life, and in 1952 became a postulant at Douai Abbey, a Benedictine monastery near Reading. The novice master there was not sympathetic to the older novices (there were three of them over 30, alongside four younger men) and was particularly nasty towards Father Barnabas because of his background as an Anglican priest. He was clothed as a novice, but left shortly afterwards and, after a short period doing odd jobs in London, he took refuge back at Cowley, where the Fathers housed him free of charge in return for work in the house. During this time he was re-integrated into the Anglican Church, but functioned as a layman. In 1953 he obtained a teaching post in the Cathedral Choir School in Bristol, and during his year there began again to function as a priest. In 1954 he moved to St Michael's College, Tenbury Wells, another choir school, which had come out of the

nineteenth-century Anglo-Catholic movement. In January 1956 he moved back to Wales to become Vicar Choral at St Asaph Cathedral.

Later in 1956 he had his first meeting with the Orthodox priest who was to guide him in the future. Father Barnabas had gone to Paris to find an old colleague who had been received into the Orthodox Church, and stayed as a guest in the small Orthodox Benedictine Monastery that operated there under the auspices of the Russian Patriarchal Church. The Hegoumenos, Archimandrite Denis Chambault made a great impression, and Father Barnabas went back for a visit each summer for the next few years. Père Denis was a great Anglophile, who was partly of English ancestry, and had previously worked in France as a photo-journalist for the *Daily Mail*.

In June 1958 he became chaplain to an Anglican Convent in St Leonard's on Sea, where he also taught in the school run by the nuns. In June 1960 he finally resigned from being an Anglican priest, moved to Paris, where he was received into the Russian Orthodox Church, and took up residence in the Benedictine Monastery under the guidance of Père Denis.

This was always a small community, with numbers fluctuating between two and five. When Father Barnabas began his Orthodox monastic life there, there were just the two. The daily office was said in Latin according to the Benedictine usage. Mass on Sundays and feast days was in French, using a modified Tridentine Rite, approved by the Russian Orthodox Church. The Mass attracted a small lay congregation, up to 20 or 30. Father Barnabas reports Père Denis as saying that most of this congregation were not really Orthodox, just dissident Catholics who liked having the service in French. Father Barnabas developed considerable doubts about the ability of a Western Rite to lead people to the fullness of Orthodox Christianity.

In addition to his work in the house, Father Barnabas attended some classes at the newly-opened Moscow Patriarchal Seminary at Ville-Moisson, where, over the next few years he attended classes in Russian, Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Dogma, Liturgics, and Patrology. These classes were taught in French. When possible he also attended Byzantine Rite services at the Russian Church and at the Seminary. Later he also taught some classes there (New Testament, Old Testament, and Latin).

Under the guidance of Père Denis, he started writing a series of 'Leaflets on Orthodoxy', an English language parallel to a French series that Père Denis also produced. These were duplicated and sent out to a circle of interested readers in UK and elsewhere. Each issue consisted of about ten pages of typescript, with some news of current activities, introductory articles on theological and spiritual topics, book reviews, and a 'Question Box' section for response to specific questions that had been sent in. Father Barnabas continued to produce this series under various titles for the rest of his life.

His problems with Western Rite led him after two years to transfer to the small Russian monastery attached to the Seminary, which was under the guidance of Metropolitan Nicholas, then Exarch for Western Europe of the Moscow Patriarchate. The other monks there were elderly Russian refugees from the 1918 emigration. After two years there, he again had the yearning to return 'home', and so, with the blessing of Metropolitan Nicholas, he returned to St Leonard's, where a friend provided him with a flat, and he was able once again to set up a chapel and start the daily round of the monastic services, but this time according to the Byzantine Orthodox usage, and mostly in English. A postulant subsequently provided the money to buy a large house in St Leonard's, into which they moved in 1965. The garage was converted into a church, and daily services were now done publicly. This marked the beginning of his endeavour to establish an Orthodox monastery in Britain, following the traditional pattern of filling the day with liturgical worship, work, study and private prayer. He chose to dedicate this monastery to the Holy Prophet Elias. His original choice was St John the Forerunner, but since there was already a community with that dedication, he chose the forerunner of the Forerunner.

What happened, however, was that the monastery as a stable community with several monks never came to be. Instead, the presence of a church with regular services attracted a congregation, mainly to the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and feasts, and became the nucleus of a parish. This was a pattern that was to be repeated several times.

In 1967 he sought a more rural location, and found a suitable property on the edge of a small village in Devon. This time the barn became the chapel. Additional rooms were constructed for the monks to come. A trickle of postulants and novices came and went. Again, a congregation appeared at the Sunday Liturgy, which developed into a parish, which Father Barnabas found to be a distraction from his work to establish a monastery.

This seems to be a good place to quote from Father Barnabas on the monastic life. In his autobiography he writes:

I remain convinced of the value of the Monastic life in the Church, and realized that St Elias Monastery, small as it was, supplied a need, since people came there from far and wide and found healing and peace in the seclusion, silence and order that prevailed there. I was anxious to keep the balance between order and informality, and somehow this seems to have been achieved. I believe it is the peculiar ethos of the Byzantine Rite which produces the quality of Orthodox Monasteries. Byzantine services are complicated, ornate, even pompous, but have their familiar and lovely side, as when people cross to light candles at the most solemn moments, and children behave with complete nonchalance, showing how at home they all are. This spirit communicates itself to a Monastic house, so there is a happy blend of the formal and informal there, yet without losing the character of a religious house. In Western Monasteries and Convents (at least until quite recently [c.1975]) there was always a great rigidity. Silences were divided into the Solemn, when no word could be spoken, and Simple, when necessary directions could be spoken, but no conversation entered into. Again the enclosure was rigidly guarded, and in Convents there were several with grilles separating the Nuns from seculars. These developments have no parallel in the Eastern Churches, neither do we divide our houses into contemplative and active, any more than we have a multiplicity of Orders. All Orthodox Monks and Nuns belong to the great fraternity of Monastics, basing their life in the Monastic and Ascetical writings of the early Fathers of the Desert, and all wear the same habit, which is more or less that described by Cassian in his Conferences and Institutes.

Again all Monks and Nuns are, by virtue of their calling, set apart for the work of Prayer, the Opus Dei, Work of God par excellence as St Benedict terms it in his Rule. But no Orthodox Monk [or] Nun would claim to be contemplative; the most they would say is that they hoped their prayer would develop into Contemplation through the leading of God's Holy Spirit.

Prayer is as much a Mystery as any of the Seven Mysteries (called in the West – Sacraments) of the Church, and there is a discipline to endure before one can acquire it. It is intimately allied with a disciplined and ordered life, and is nourished on a personal level by the official prayer of the Church known as the liturgical office. It was ever my intention to make the recitation of the divine offices ... the framework around which the daily life of the Monastery would revolve, and this was achieved in the six years I spent in Willand. The rest of the prayer life of the Monk was left to him, and though we sometimes said the Jesus Prayer in common this never replaced the Divine Office. However the Byzantine office postulates a choir in order to be done effectively, and this is where the strain came in when we were just two people.'

A little comment on that last point. Two people are sufficient to do much of the Byzantine services quite well, provided that they both know what they are doing and are able to sing the services in the traditional antiphonal manner. The problem that Father Barnabas had most of the time was that he was constantly having to train the second person, and in most cases, as soon as they got reasonably proficient, they left.

After six years in Devon he moved back to his homeland in Wales, first for six months in a remote farmhouse, then for a few months in a small rented cottage, and then in 1974 to the final

location of St Elias Monastery in the little village of New Mills in Montgomeryshire. This was his home until his death in 1996, and was the longest period that he spent at one address in his life.

However, the number of visitors, particularly non-monastic visitors, disturbed his tranquillity and so he sought a place of retreat. First he bought a house in Llanelli, where he had fewer visitors but lived in close proximity to an Orthodox family who lived there and who visited St Elias fairly frequently. Again this became the focus for the beginning of a parish, and so he sold that house and later bought a house in Aberfan. There he had fewer visitors and could spend more time in solitary prayer.

His final years were marked with progressive health problems. Arthritis made movement and standing difficult. Progressive deafness made communication more difficult (other than by letter) and services in the chapel were a strain for everyone when he could not hear what was being read.

It might be considered that his life was a failure. He had set out to found a monastery and died virtually alone, although he had a wide circle of friends who came to his funeral. However, if one looks more closely, he succeeded in many things, even though he was not deliberately trying to do so. If one looks first at the 12 men that he clothed as novice monks: two have died; one left to study at an Orthodox seminary, married and was ordained a priest, becoming a bishop after the death of his wife; three are priest-monks working in various parts of Great Britain; one left to study theology, married and became an Anglican priest; one transferred to another monastery, but eventually left the monastic life to marry; one moved to another monastery, but I have heard nothing of him since; for the other three, I know nothing of their current activity. Two others spent time as postulants but did not progress further, and subsequently married and were ordained as Orthodox priests. In addition to this there are four parishes that grew directly out of his work. For all his desire to be a monk, he was actually a very good pastor of non-monastics. Looking at the question of his apparent outward failure, I quote from an article he wrote in 1968 (when in Devon).

### **Hid With Christ in God**

Within a few miles of St Elias Monastery are the ruins of a Cistercian Abbey, Dunkeswell, destroyed in the reign of Henry VIII, the monks dispersed and the buildings allowed to fall into ruin. Recently, with the consent of the Vicar, our small community was allowed to sing Vespers in the Church built over the ruins, and in the course of the service when we reached the petition 'for all our devout fathers and brethren, Orthodox believers, departed this life before us, who here and in all the world lie asleep in the Lord', we called to remembrance those monks of old who lived and died within these walls, whose witness in that particular place came to an abrupt and cruel end, who yet lived not in vain but left a fragrant memory behind them. I have seen places behind the Iron Curtain where a similar fate overtook monks in our own day; and in recent years the cruel story of Tibet, that land of Monasteries and hermitages now the prey of the atheistic-communist overlords.

My reflections in monastic ruins tend towards a philosophical anatomy of failure (or success – it depends on one's standpoint!), for there have been in the last century several gallant attempts to lay foundations of monastic communities which apparently did not succeed. Were the offers vain? Was the method wrong? Do we say with the disciples, 'To what purpose is this waste?' (Mt 26:8,) or with Our Lord, 'They have wrought a good work upon me' (Mt 5:10).

Let me tell the story of five remarkable men who span the years from 1833 to 1965, who belonged to the Orthodox, Roman and Anglican Churches, who remained true to their ideal but died seeing no fruit of their work.

1. Henry Pailey Hughes; born in 1833, the son of the Rector of Rhoscolyn, Anglesey, became a convert to Catholicism in his youth and later studied for the Priesthood in Portugal. After his ordination, being a fluent linguist he began a peripatetic mission to several countries: Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Italy, Africa, USA, and South America. But in 1886 he returned to his native Wales, receiving his Bishop's blessing as well as that of his superior (for he was a tertiary of the

Dominican Order) to found a hermitage on the island of St Tudwal, 1 mile out of Pwllheli in North Wales. He had with him 2 lay-brothers and 2 boys, and their life on the island consisted of frugal living, prayer, silence and manual work, for they built their own halls and cultivated the fertile but neglected island. In those days there was bitter opposition to Catholicism, and despite the attractive preaching of Fr Hughes there were no converts. Worn out by his austerities and weakened by years of intensive activity he lived only one year on St Tudwal's Island, dying on December 16th 1887 only 54 years of age. Without their leader the frail community was lost and its members dispersed to other places. I have often prayed by Fr Hughes' grave in Llanengan Churchyard, on Llyn Peninsula where it is recorded that 'he worked as an Apostle in many a land and laboured for the Catholic Faith. He died in his work. RIP.'

2. Fr Ignatius of Llanthony born in 1837 was known as Joseph Leycester Lyne till he adopted the monastic name of Ignatius (of Loyola not Antioch!) in 1864 when he pronounced monastic vows before Dr Pusey. Like Fr Hughes, Ignatius had an adventurous career before he finally settled in Wales, not on an island but in a valley near the ruins of the Augustinian Priory of Llanthony. Today there are two monastic ruins in the lovely vale of Ewyas – that of the Abbey destroyed at the Reformation and that of the Monastery, only parts of which are used as an ordinary dwelling house.

There are several reasons why this monastic essay did not succeed as any reader of the three biographies of Ignatius – that of Baroness de Bertouche, Donald Attwater and Arthur Calder Marshall, will reveal. But does the fact that his small community petered out at his death and that Llanthony is today in ruins mean that Ignatius' efforts were all in vain? In my life I have met three people who knew him well. Mr John Richards was a servitor in the Monastery for some years. He spoke of the aura of light which surrounded Ignatius as he prayed. He converted him to a life of self-discipline after many years of dissipation. Mrs Parry remembered visits to the Monastery in her youth and the persuasive oratory of Ignatius which melted every stony heart. Fr Boxall was a boy in the old school which Ignatius had in the Monastery. He spoke of Ignatius' power over devils and of the holy visions which were undoubtedly authentic. All three, now dead, spoke of one who had touched their lives and altered their course towards God. There must be many others who could so testify. Dean Spencer Ellis, now aged 85 remembers visits of Ignatius to his father's Vicarage when the Dean was a schoolboy, and how fascinating everybody found him. He did not succeed as the world sees success but he did God's work despite the hostility of the official Church of his day.

3. Fr Charles de Foucauld is the best known of these figures, for though he found no 'success' in his life time, after his death there has arisen a great devotion to him and today congregations of religious both for men and women claim to be his spiritual children.

Born into a noble French family in 1858 Charles followed the family example and became an officer. His life was gay, worldly and selfish till he met the Abbé Huvelin in his Confessional at St Augustine's Church in Paris. Thereafter it took the direction of complete and whole-hearted consecration to God, passing through phases of life at a Cistercian Monastery, as servitor in a Carmelite Convent in Palestine and culminating in the life of priest-hermit in various hermitages in the Sahara. The rule Fr Charles followed was extremely severe and few there were who lived it for long with him. At the time of his death by an assassin on December 1st 1916, he had no novices and only one conversion – here would seem to be failure indeed – yet again, the grain had died and out of his death sprang new life in people who take Charles de Foucauld as their exemplar in a life of utter self-consecration through prayer and service to others in Christ.

4. Fr William of Glasshampton, whose life was written by Fr Curtis CR, is becoming ever better known as the years pass and his solitary witness is seen in larger perspective

He began his religious life in that attractive (alas now defunct) Community of Anglican Conventual Franciscans called the Society of Divine Compassion. Impelled by the desire to live the life of an enclosed Monk and thus restore this form of life in the Anglican Church, he obtained, with great difficulty be it said, release from his community, and so began his independent life (after the manner of innumerable Orthodox founders) in the Monastery he built out of abandoned stables at Glasshampton. This he dedicated to the Mystery of Our Lady at the Cross – and the element of suffering did not ever escape his foundation. He lived the enclosed life from 1918 till Easter Day

1937 when he died, and at the end he found himself alone, for many came and went finding the life too hard and the ideal too high. I stayed with Fr William for a brief period in 1933 when only 17 years of age. There was no question of his then accepting novices and I went at his recommendation to the Novitiate of the Society of St John the Evangelist at Cowley where the principles of true Monastic Life as it was then lived at Cowley became my study, though the fruit-bearing did not come till much later.

A man of deep interior prayer and utter consecration, not learned academically but spiritually and, intellectually alert to a high degree, Fr William again failed as the world sees it. His own Monastery so lovingly and patiently constructed did not house a community of enclosed monks, but he left his indelible mark on souls. One community, that of Fr Robert Gofton Salmond at Crawley Down owes its inspiration directly to Fr William for Fr Robert was a real disciple of the Staretz. Another community, that of the Anglican Cistercians under Fr Aelred at Ewell Monastery, West Malling, Kent, owes its inspiration indirectly to the Staretz of Glasshampton. Both these ideals have encountered great difficulties and trials, but they exist and radiate a spirit of peace and consecration within and without the confines of the Anglican Communion.

Fr William also directed a few Anglican Anchoresses who existed in those days. There was Sister Mary Fidelia in Wales, Sister Adeline in Somerset, two others on the Isle of Wight, to whom the Staretz of Glasshampton was a sure guide in this little known by-path of spirituality. He would occasionally visit these enclosed hermits in their anchor-holds to help them in their solitary vocation, but otherwise he rarely left his own enclosure. In retrospect, how like the Orthodox ideal of the monk Fr William was – yet he had no great knowledge of Eastern Spirituality. He was guided there directly by the Holy Spirit, but in fact on the higher mystical level of prayer the differences between East and West are minimal, and Fr William had indeed reached this level through persistent co-operation with divine grace.

5. Père Denis (Chambault) was born in Paris in 1899 and died in Paris on May 3rd 1965. Like all the others of whom I have written in this article he had had a full active life until he entered monasticism, for he began life as a photographer-reporter of the 'Daily Mail' in France, but being drawn to religious practice and finding no satisfaction in the triumphalist Catholic Church of those days he became attached to the ex-RC priest, Charles Winnaert, who had formed an evangelical-Catholic body, in which Lucien Chambault received priests' orders. In 1937 this little body was received into communion with the Orthodox Church, the founder being received in his Catholic priest's Orders and not in the episcopate obtained from episcopi vagantes sources and Fr Lucien being quickly ordained priest by an Orthodox bishop to ensure the sacramental life of the little group.

In 1944, Fr Lucien pronounced his monastic vows according to the Byzantine formula and became superior of the little group of men, all of western background, whom he tried to form into a Benedictine community. Some of his disciples were quite remarkable men, others were a burden to him, and all were sorely tried by the poverty, cramped conditions and lack of order in their setting at rue d'Alleray. In addition there was the novelty of integrating both the Western Rite and Benedictine monachism into a very Russian and not always sympathetic setting. I myself joined this community in its latter days and while my affection, respect and admiration for the Staretz never failed I could see that his presentation of both Benedictine monachism and Western rite left very much to be desired and so was transferred to another Monastery where the authentic form of Eastern Orthodox Spirituality was to be found.

So Père Denis died the sole member of his community and with him died the Benedictine life in Orthodoxy – the ideal which he cherished to the end. There were moments of deep sadness in his life – I often saw him in tears – even bitterness and irony at times, yet underneath, there remained his compassionate soul, and he died in harness.

I could write at far greater length about all these extraordinary characters. All failed, in the world's estimation; all succeeded in God's, for they never gave up the struggle and were faithful to their vows to the end. It is not easy to go on year after year with no apparent fruit to show for one's labours, yet all those men were convinced that God had made and called them to be what they were,

and though each one passed through Gethsemane they remained true to their ideal, for the only real failure is when one gives up the struggle. Of them all we could say in the words of the Wisdom of Solomon (V 4,5,) ‘We fools accounted his life madness and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the Children of God and his lot is among the Saints!’

I hope there will always be in the Church examples of such fools in Christ and that the less ‘eccentric’ will have sufficient greatness themselves to perceive the greatness of such men. It is not only that they add variety to life but that they contribute to its spiritual richness by their perseverance in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds, fidelity to their ideal, indifference to results or to the world’s condemnation or praise, and a spiritual altruism of a depth difficult for ordinary mortals to gauge. May they inspire us by their examples and help us by their prayers from beyond the Veil!

To look more closely at some of Father Barnabas’s teaching, we have this article on asceticism from 20 years later, in 1988:

### **The Joy of Asceticism**

‘When knowledge follows the desire of the flesh, it brings with it these tendencies: health, vanity, adornment, rest for the body, and eagerness for the wisdom of that logic which is suitable for the administration of this world; it is constantly making new discoveries both in skills and knowledge, and abounds also in everything else that is the crown of the body in this visible world.’ (St Macarius, d. 390, ‘Mystic Treatises 6)

These remarkable words of Macarius are a perfect description of our own materialistic and technological West. It is clear from these words that this great saint believed that sin on the macroscale was sown by sin on the microscale, that is, by people personally following the desires of their body rather than the will of God. Why is there this connection, and how can we repent of this domination of our being by irrational desires of the mind and body?

The Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being’ (Genesis 2:8). Man is a unity of flesh and spirit and therefore his whole destiny and fulfilment is inextricably bound up with the harmonious and loving relationship of these two ‘energies’, as Christos Yannaras calls these two aspects of the human person. We can identify four types of relationship in our daily lives, and in all of these matter plays a vital role. There are the relationships of:

- each person’s body and spirit
- man and the rest of the cosmos
- person to person
- mankind to God.

In all these the active, directing ‘elements’ are God’s grace and man’s free spiritual will. However, communion (or lack of) is expressed through matter in general, and through the human body in particular. Man’s fall was and is still today expressed through his abuse of matter, and on the other hand, mankind’s redemption was effected through God uniting Himself with a material body in the Incarnation.

Though none of these modes of relationship can be separated from the others, I would like now to concentrate on the first of these four. We can call this ‘asceticism’ – the struggle of each person, with the help of God, to gather back together his or her fragmented being into a wholeness, into holiness. The aim is nothing less than to be a worthy temple for God, to be ‘deified’, to acquire the Holy Spirit. Let us not forget that though this struggle is a violent one – ‘From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and men of violence take it by force’ (Mt 11:12) – its end and nourishment is joy. It is above all a return from what is unnatural to what is natural. It is a difficult journey back to Paradise which is helped by the pilgrim being offered fruits of that very Paradise whilst he is on the road.

This asceticism, or ‘training’ as the word means in the Greek, is clearly for all people and not just for monastics. What then are some of the practical guidelines which the holy Fathers of the Church give to us athletes in the world?

1. The first step is to make a decisive, deliberate choice to live only for Christ, and not for himself. Such a person desires all his life to know and fulfil the will of his Beloved, whatever the cost. Such a person knows that this course is the only path that gives joy and peace. With St Paul he determines in the innermost recesses of his being: ‘Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord’ (Phil. 2:8).

2. Pray and seek earnestly for a wise and experienced spiritual guide, if you do not already have one. The nature of sin is such that it tends to blind us or at least confuse our perception. To guide oneself out of the tangle of our passions and bad habits is extremely difficult. A good guide is of great help not only in that we draw on their experience, but also in that they are not us! That is to say, they are outside our muddle of prejudices, weaknesses and blind spots and tend to be able to see to us more objectively than we can ourselves.

It must be said here that all the Orthodox ascetic writers take for granted of the reader membership in the one Apostolic and Catholic Church when they speak of personal spiritual practices. Repentance can never be individualistic, but to blossom into fullness of joy requires also a faith in correct doctrine and a full sacramental life in the One Church. Orthodox spirituality cannot be separated from Orthodox doctrine and ecclesiology.

If we cannot find a suitable spiritual guide, then we can glean whatever we can from godly people whom we chance upon and we can gain much from tried and tested books. Tito Colliander’s ‘The Way of the Ascetics’ (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press), ‘Unseen Warfare’ (ed. Theophan the Recluse and Nicodemus, publ. Mowbrays) and ‘The Philokalia’ (Faber and Faber) are three very good books.

3. Guard your thoughts and repel a bad thought immediately it knocks. We cannot altogether stop such thoughts coming to us, but we can recognize them for what they are and reject them before they enter the temple of our soul and defile us. The Fathers even say that to let a thought tarry in our mind is not yet sin, nevertheless they warn that this is a step nearer to being attracted by it. When we recognize a thought as bad (it might be from a demon, from an image of our imagination or from a passion within us) we should immediately turn to prayer. Perhaps it is the Jesus Prayer, or you can sing something, or you may find it most helpful to meditate on Scripture. But whatever way you use, robustly reject the suggestion.

How can we discern such suggestions, if they are godly or not? The better that we know the Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church the easier it becomes. Also, and most importantly, a truly humble spirit will be revealed the right through whatever means. As the Psalmist says: ‘He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way’ (Psalm 25:9). Saint Seraphim speaks also about the effect a certain thought has on the feeling of the heart. Because the devil is cold, his suggestions cool the heart, and likewise, because the Lord is light and fire, His promptings bring lightness, sweetness and warmth to the heart.

4. To the passions that hold us in their grip, apply the medicine of the virtues which are the opposite of these passions. Because passions are usually the fruit of our repeatedly sinning in a particular area and thus developing bad habits and impulses, they require patient and diligent struggle and prayer. If we are subject to gluttony, fast and pray more and learn to drink and eat the pleasure of God’s presence. As the Psalmist says: ‘in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore’ (Ps 15:11). If we are compulsive talkers we need to foster the love of listening and drawing wisdom from others. Again, a positive fostering of the love of the sweetness of the Holy Spirit’s presence within the heart naturally quenches hitherto powerful compulsions. If we are prone to sexual sin, foster the love of a clear conscience which comes from chastity. Redirect the eros we had previously misdirected in lust toward desire for God. The greatest of fornicators, like St Mary of Egypt used to be, could only be delivered of their lust through a comparative passion and desire for God Himself. If greed holds us, then delight in almsgiving

saying to ourselves, 'If you desire to store things up and become rich, then lay up for yourself treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume.'

When a truly humble man looks upon the sins of this modern world: violence, abortion, war, pollution, ugliness – he first sees himself as a cause and he labours all the more to repent and become again a priest, king and prophet of the Most High. It is such transfigured people who out of the deserts, forsaken places, and wastelands replant Paradise.

The teaching of Father Barnabas was rooted in the traditions of the Orthodox Church – the Scriptures, the Fathers and the Service Books – as shown in this talk he gave in 1966:

### **Spirituality in the Orthodox Tradition**

The theme of our Conference is 'Spirituality Today' and I have been asked to give a brief historical introduction from the Orthodox point of view.

First let us ask what exactly we mean by 'spirituality'. It is a very wide term dealing as it does with the life of man's body and its discipline by fasting, and his soul, the animating principle of his being; therefore it deals with the nourishment of that life and this comprises his life of communion with God in his Triune Revelation – communion through Sacrament and Prayer – Prayer both private and intimate as well as public and official as approved and developed across the centuries by the Orthodox Church. We cannot arrive at an historical appreciation of the intimate Communion between man's soul and God except in so far as we have records in writing of such intimate reciprocal action between the Creator and creature, and this we do have in the classic texts of the Orthodox Church. These texts form the sources from which we may deduce the course of development of spirituality in the Orthodox Church.

What then are these texts?

1. They are first and foremost and ever remain basically, the Canonical Scriptures. Here let it be noted that the official text of the OT is that of the LXX – in this respect Orthodox Bibles resemble in their OT order that of the RC Bible rather than the Protestant. Its NT text is that as finally defined by St Athanasius in his Paschal letter of 367 AD and substantially that of the Western Church today though the Russian and Slavonic order of NT books does not agree with the Western Bible.

It can never be emphasised too vigorously that Orthodox spirituality is steeped in the Bible – never interpreted as do the Protestant fundamentalists of today, nor as do the Modernists to whom it seems that nothing is barred and no sanctuary too sacred for profane intrusion.

The 'Moralia' of St Basil is a standing example of how deeply versed in Scripture the Fathers of the Church were. They draw from it all possible moral lessons; in places they interpret it typologically, figuratively or mystically. No incident, name or number is too insignificant not to bear some lesson of profit to the soul.

2. Our next contribution to Spirituality comes from books considered at one time so near the Canonical NT books as to be included with them, yet finally to be rejected from the completed Canon as found in the 4th century. These books are the Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnabas, Apocalypse of Peter, and the Epistle of Clement.

Closely allied to these come the early Apostolic Fathers who form the bridge linking this sub-Apostolic age with the 4th and 5th centuries, the age of the Cappadocian Fathers, the Three Holy Doctors, and the other great champions of Orthodoxy in the Christological controversies which rocked the Church at that period and the echoes of which still ring down the centuries ever since, though the disputed points have been settled for all who accept Authority at all by what are now known as the Seven Ecumenical Councils (Nicaea 325; Constantinople 381; Ephesus 431; Chalcedon 451; Constantinople II 553; Constantinople III 680; Nicaea II 787).

Among these Apostolic Fathers come St Ignatius of Antioch, St Polycarp of Smyrna, St Clement of Rome, St Justin Martyr, and St Theophilus of Antioch (c.180).

St Irenaeus of Lyons, born in Smyrna in 140, a pupil of Polycarp, who wrote in Greek yet lived in the West, contributes at a deep level to theology, both mystical and dogmatic, as well as giving indications of the developing ecclesiology of the age.

St Clement of Alexandria is one of the distinguished writers of the 2nd century Alexandrine school, whose later and more brilliant exponent was Origen – a school which was to shine brilliantly for a time in rivalry with that of Antioch and later to be eclipsed as the Christological controversies swept across Egypt finally plunging the Egyptian Church into the floods of the Monophysite heresy.

It should be remembered that this period was the age of persecution – no Christian was safe from death until the Constantinian Edict of Milan in 313 AD – yet what a fruitful period it was spiritually – not only in theological writings but in living and dying for Christ and in Christ. It is the age when the classic Liturgies of Christendom were hammered out – each great Church having its rite practised by its leading hierarchs as well as spreading to the small isolated Christian worshipping communities, glad to be thus linked in prayer with those who were suffering in the great cities.

The period following Nicaea 325 onwards is the golden age of Patrology when flourished such figures as St Athanasius of Alexandria, St Eusebius of Caesarea, St Cyril of Jerusalem, the Cappadocian Fathers: St Basil of Caesarea, St Gregory Nazianzen, St Gregory of Nyssa, and the Antiochan School whose most noted writer is St John Chrysostom.

Other names could be added to the galaxy already mentioned – the list is not meant to be exclusive – but this will bring us to the point we wish to make, that these writers, steeped as they were in the Bible, loyal to the line of development in the Great Church, nourished spirituality. In their day as they defended the Orthodox faith and still nourish Orthodox spirituality, for no one can be an exponent of contemporary Orthodox spirituality who is not acquainted with classic Patrology. So linked is it with Holy Scripture that Orthodoxy has never had the two source idea prevalent in the West of Scripture and Tradition: rather Scripture forms the major and basic part of Tradition, for the Fathers, far from enunciating doctrines not contained in scripture, develop, deepen, and apply Scriptural truths in their day.

3. The next element contributing to spirituality is the Liturgies, to which we have briefly referred earlier in passing. It is becoming ever more clear to present day scholars that the Christian Church took over a great deal of liturgical form of prayer from that of the Jewish Synagogue. Quite early in its history there were forms of morning and evening prayer consisting of Psalms, lections and intercessions, all centering round the Eucharist, ‘ή κλασις του άρτου, [the breaking of bread], the Sacrifice of the New Covenant given the Church by her Founder, Christ. As the Church expanded the Eucharistic rites were to receive profoundly enriching developments, and soon each See had its own way of celebrating the divine Mysteries, so that eventually there arose three liturgical groups, the Antiochene or Syrian group, the Alexandrian or Egyptian group and the Roman or Western group. As the centuries passed there were further sub-divisions of these groups, especially in view of the fact that schisms (some permanent) began in the 4th century and Christians became more and more separated from one another.

In time, too, it was the Antiochene group that took possession of the Orthodox Church so that finally it was left with its great classical Eucharistic Liturgies from the 5th century onwards to our day – the normal liturgy of St John Chrysostom, that of St Basil celebrated in Lent and a few other days, that of St James of Jerusalem and that of St Gregory of Rome (so-called) of the Pre-sanctified, celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent.

The Eucharistic Liturgy while forming spirituality is itself to some degree formed by the piety of those who live by it. Consider, for instance, what place the doctrine of the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father has in Orthodox theology, what a place it has in the Liturgy – not only the Epiclesis, but several petitions that through the Holy Gifts worthily offered and received we may be participants in the Holy Spirit.

The Eucharist is to the divine office as the flower is to the plant – or the fruit to the tree, and we separate the two at our peril. In the very early centuries the Eucharist was prepared for by psalmody and lections, which forms, as the Church expanded, took independent shape in Morning, Evening and night prayers. After the 3rd century there arose the Monastic movement, and as the result of the more mature fruit of Monasticism we have the developed offices in use in the Eastern and Western Churches: in the East longer and with more colour and ceremony adapted in some degree from the

ceremonial of the Byzantine Court. When chrystalized the Eastern offices were – Midnight Office, Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, Compline and the inter-hours said between the little hours and little Vespers said on great feasts before Great Vespers so that liturgical prayer could be continuous on some days and nights as it still is at times on Mount Athos today.

This brings us to our great element in spirituality - Monasticism.

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls it is becoming evident that there were monastic or semi-monastic groups of a highly developed spirituality in or on the fringe of Christianity from its earliest days, and moreover that these groups were linked with the OT Nazarites and Sons of the Prophets who were to exercise an influence on the distinctly Christian monastic experiments in Egypt and Syria and Palestine from the 3rd century onwards.

Apart from the influence of the widespread Monastic movement on the liturgical prayer of the Church (and this cannot be over-emphasized as in some Orthodox offices liturgical scholars can disentangle the parochial element from that introduced later and cleverly cemented into it from Monastic sources) the monks also exercised a profound and formative influence on the ascetical life of ordinary Christians and their private prayer.

A line of development in these two directions can be discerned in the writings of Evagnus of Pontus, with his aphorisms on pure prayer; St Macarius of Egypt and his mysticism of the heart; St Diodocus of Photice (d.470) who speaks of light seen without image or imagination and a certain tasting in this life of divine consolation. St Athanasius' life of St Anthony did much to make 'desert spirituality' admired and imitated by Christians, and the founding of the Monastery on Sinai by Justinian in the 6th century accelerated the movement of pure prayer, silence and inactivity or peace – called hesychasm.

In the early 7th century one of its greatest luminaries was the Higoumen John, author of the Ladder of Divine Ascent, and from that book called John Climacus (580-650 A.D.). Here are the roots of the monastic exercise of the Prayer of Jesus whereby the monk fulfilled the apostolic precept to 'pray without ceasing' (I Thess. 5:17). This form of prayer with its attendant 'ascesis' was later developed by Nicepheros the Hesychast, Gregory the Sinaite and culminated in the 14th century by St Gregory Palamas. So great is the influence of St John Climacus that he is regarded as the great Eastern doctor of Spirituality and especially commemorated by a feast on the 4th Sunday in Lent.

Two great names connected with spirituality came in the intervening Period – St John of Damascus and St Simeon the New Theologian. It is to St John Damascene that we owe the defence of Icons and of the validity of the prayers to the Saints, besides the enrichment of the Church by several Canons – i.e. that feature of worship at Orthodox Matins peculiar to the Byzantine rite, consisting of 9 odes, verses, kontakia, and troparia all of a devotional nature but steeped in dogmatic teaching.

St Simeon the New Theologian (917-1022), a monk of St Mammias' Monastery at Constantinople, poet and mystic, describes in his writings the essence of spirituality – communion with that which cannot be communicated, knowledge of that which cannot be known – this made possible by, with, and through the Incarnation, hence the completely Christo-centric nature of the spirituality of St Simeon.

Hesychasm and the Prayer of Jesus were spread ever further and deeper in the Eastern Church (especially the Slav portions) through the teachings and writings of the two 14th century monks, Gregory of Sinai and Nicephorus, hermit-monk of Mount Athos and a convert from the Roman Church. Gregory the Sinaite, who passed from Sinai to Athos and thence to Thrace, considered the hermit life as definitely superior to that of the coenobite, and was not afraid of depreciating psalmodizing in favour of the prayer of quiet (hesychia) – a point of view valid in Orthodoxy but not counselled by all Fathers before or since. It should be noted that Gregory and other Hesychast teachers of his school considered the imagination as the enemy of pure prayer – this in contrast with Western masters of spirituality who taught how the imagination could be used to acquire pure prayer, e.g. St Ignatius of Loyola or the Western rosary.

The great exponent of hesychasm was St Gregory Palamas, born 1296, died 1359 and canonized in 1368 by Philotheus the Ecumenical Patriarch, whose feast day is observed on November 14th and on the Second Sunday of Lent. The controversy about hesychasm was provoked by Barlaam, a monk of Western origin who had come to the East because of the Nominalist philosophy then widespread in the West and who was attracted by the Apophatic approach of the Eastern Church in general. He made a diligent research into Hesychasm, was repelled by its practice and in writing tracts against it showed that his own philosophy was nominalist, impregnated with Neo-Platonic thought. The answer of Gregory Palamas placed all the prayer life of the Orthodox Church, its Jesus Prayer, and its apophaticism in the context of the Christian Revelation, not in that of a humanist, or Neo-Platonic philosophy, and this reply of Palamas was arranged in such a way as to become a statement signed by the ruling monasteries of Athos, thus receiving the imprimatur of Orthodoxy's leading monastic centres. This is known as the Hagioretic Tome (1340-1341) and its message is that the deifying Grace of God seen as the uncreated light of Mount Tabor was accessible in advance to Prophets of the Old Testament and is now the common heritage of the Church rendered to the souls of those who forsake all for His sake through participation through the Holy Spirit.

Passing through Bulgaria and Kiev, Hesychasm finally found a fruitful field for its dissemination in the Russian monasteries. In the 14th century St Sergius of Radonezh founded his famous Lavra of the Holy Trinity not far from Moscow, one of the great centres of spiritual culture in mediaeval Russia. A century later two spiritualities were in conflict in the famous controversy between St Nilus Sorsky who held intransigent views on monastic poverty and St Joseph of Volokolamsk who believed in possessions being consecrated by the monks for the good of the people – a point of view which was later to gain the day in Russia. St Nilus, spiritual adept as he was, left a Testament in the form of a Rule in which his emphasis on the prophetic and eschatological role of monasticism (ever a feature of Orthodox monasticism) is underlined and of course his insistence on real poverty.

This theme received another support in the 19th century through the establishment of the Hermitage of the Beheading of St John the Baptist at Optina. Not only were monks and religious people refreshed here but lay people of eminence like Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Khomiakov, Soloviev and Tolstoi came to consult the Startsi on deep spiritual problems. A Saint in whom is found practically the quintessence of Russian Orthodox spirit is St Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833) – monk, hermit, hesychast, starets, counsellor, severe ascetic, yet kindest lover of fallen humanity.

As for the literature which has contributed most to Orthodox spirituality it is no doubt that apart from the Bible the Philocalia has done most to sustain the faith. Appearing first in Greek in 1782, this collection of over 30 works of spiritual writers beginning with the Desert Fathers and ending with Simeon of Thessalonica was translated into Slavonic by the eminent Paissy Velichkovsky (1722-1794). This book, so profound yet so practical, contains the essence of Orthodox spirituality, and though the writers range from the 4th century to the 15th they are yet linked to one another by their insistence on the theme of contemplation of God achieved through the Prayer of Jesus.

We started this historical conspectus of Orthodox spirituality by an attempt at a definition of our term. Can we really learn what spirituality is in a detached, non-involved, scientific way? No we cannot. To appreciate the spirituality of any Church or indeed of any of the great religions of the world one must penetrate inside that society, live by its precepts, absorb its spirit, accept its discipline – even then one has the feeling of entering a province so rich in spiritual experience that one hesitates to speak about it, afraid of giving a distorted view or limiting its riches in any way by what one says or omits to say. Spirituality is indeed caught, not taught, for it is living a life that is involved and not studying such or such religious phenomena in a detached, scientific way.

Here we have seen how continuous and unbroken is the Orthodox tradition which has known no Renaissance, Reformation, or Counter-reformation, yet which on the other hand, has for a very brief period only been free from persecution from the outside. The guardians of it have been the monasteries and hermitages whence its influence has penetrated deeply into the people, some of whom live a spirituality at a deep level while engaged in their life in the world. For the process of purgation, leading to the control of the passions then to the state known as apathy, the control of the senses, mind, memory, imagination, all this achieved by constant prayer leading to contemplation, is

true spirituality and the proud property not only of monks vowed to this life but of all of those of God's children who take seriously Christ's commands: 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect' (Mt 5:48).

Archimandrite Kyril

\*\*\*\*\*

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT: OUR FATHER AND MOTHER**

### **A Conference Workshop**

The question at this workshop was, what can be done when, as happens for whatever reason, recourse to a father or mother is not possible? The answer lies in the capacity of the Holy Spirit to train us by the same standards by which he trains all disciples of Christ, whether they are fathers or not: that is, according to the scriptures, to love others, to be obedient to Christ's commandments, and to walk in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The tradition of the Church indicates that we must feed on Christ the Word of God in our hearts. By that we mean reading the scriptures with the expectation that the Holy Spirit will warm our hearts for obedience. If we want to know what the scriptures mean, we have the saints as perfect exemplars of scripture. The saints show us, as do the scriptures, that there is but one way of holiness in Christ. There is a lived tradition of holiness which is the same in whatever place it has existed and in whichever period of time we may consider. The 'Living Tradition', being so unified, is such that every Christian should aspire to attach himself to it. We are not in the business of making our own spirituality: we should beware of the 'pick and mix' mentality.

In the last fifty years an enormous number of books of lives of saints, of their writings and studies of them have appeared. Each of us can find saints whose writings the Holy Spirit may also use to warm our hearts to obedience.

The Scripture and the Fathers are one in their stress on the vital role of the heart. The heart has to be opened by Christ and fully surrendered to him. We must constantly implore Christ to send the Holy Spirit into our hearts that he may cleanse it and make us like Christ. This must continue till the Holy Spirit unites in Christ our emotional and mental functioning (illumination and union) and gains complete control over them

The Fathers set out the way of holiness in detail. We begin at the beginning (humility!) when we are willing to let the Holy Spirit show us everything in our hearts of which we need to repent. This proves to be the hard work. The Holy Spirit builds up our faith, hope and love through every trial and difficulty. He will strengthen us in everything that we need to do, and with his help we will make progress. This process however can be extremely confusing. There are many illusions to be shed. Help and support of those who have already endured will be necessary. We must use whatever help we can find. It can usually be found somewhere.

The sacrament of confession should be used regularly even if the priest does not consider himself to be a spiritual father. It should be used not in the interest of 'wiping one's slate clean' so much as discerning how Christ wishes our life to go forward at any particular moment. The saints also are eager to help and we should pray to them every day. The liturgy teaches us how heaven and earth are united and how the divine grace of the Holy Spirit moves within this unity. 'Union in Christ', given to us at baptism, becomes a perceived reality. All of us have access to this and all of us can experience the grace to partake of this union according to our measure

Fr John Musther

\*\*\*\*\*

## FELLOWSHIP YOUTH ACTIVITIES

### **Snowdon**

The Orthodox Youth Fellowship of St John the Baptist organised a weekend in the beautiful Snowdonia on 18/19 September 2010. This was the fifth weekend organised there, the last having taken place in March 2010. Thirteen people from all over England (including one visiting from the United States) attended. Ten people arrived on Friday 17 September, with the rest arriving at a more leisurely pace on Saturday. The cottage we stayed in is a lovely, old house. With its huge fireplace, it certainly presented a tempting sight on arrival. Unfortunately for the people who got there first, the cottage was still very much locked! The person bearing the keys was to arrive only later in the day. After several, somewhat creative, attempts to enter the cottage, that group of five people decided to spend Friday night at the neighbouring youth hostel to minimise any inconvenience. This unexpected issue was handled with great humour and that humour flavoured the whole weekend!

After a leisurely English breakfast on Saturday morning and picnic preparations, we all headed out for a walk in the countryside. It rained the whole time and, by the time we sat down for lunch, the picnic was slightly soggy, but everyone had a great time! This was followed in the evening by some singing and we enjoyed an appetising home-cooked meal. We then had our evening prayers together and finished the day with some hilarious charades.

On Sunday, we woke up early to clean the cottage before we left for Church. We attended a lovely service at Fr Deiniol's church and some of us sang in the choir. Fr Deiniol then kindly invited us to have lunch at his house, where we were able to spend some time with him and his parishioners and pray before our departure. The weekend went by very quickly. From it, people remember in particular the laughter, the singing and the great company.

### **Future events**

The Youth Committee is now planning another weekend, this time in Northampton with Fr Timothy Curtis on 20-21 November 2010. The Committee is to organise some singing workshops (both liturgical and folkloric) for Orthodox youths aged 7-17 on the Saturday. This will be followed by a concert later that evening, which is being organised jointly with the Romanian parish of Northampton. Separately, the Committee has also started to put some ideas together for the next Youth Festival in Spring next year.

*Helen Phillips*

## AN AMERICAN IN DERBYSHIRE

The dancing was all the same. The interests, the atmosphere, the laughs, the feeling of comraderie, all the same as what I had experienced in America. Attending the Orthodox Youth Festival was like entering into a new world full of new faces and new experiences, but at the same time there was a strong sense of déjà vu. And isn't that what it should be like?

My friend Miriam had put the bug in my ear to attend a Festival at least three years ago. I was living in the States at the time, and the distance seemed like too much of a barrier to justify the trip. As providence would have it, however, almost two years ago I decided to enrol in a masters program at the University of Thessaloniki, Greece which, of course, put me in much closer proximity to the UK than I could have ever imagined. Thus, when Miriam's annual e-mail came with the encouraging 'Mike! Come to the Youth Festival!' as its subject line the possibility seemed much more tangible. Thankfully everything fell right into place and before I knew it I was on the plane bound for England and ready for the Festival!

Having attended many similar events in the States, I was very interested to see how things would compare. After meeting Miriam at the airport and getting a wonderful speed-tour the next day of London (the Tower and beefeaters included), we took the road trip to the beautiful countryside retreat centre where the conference would take place. I could not believe my eyes. It was like driving by a Jane Austen movie with beautiful rolling hills, traditional stone mansions, houses and huts, flocks of sheep and stone walls criss-crossing the landscape. As we approached the centre the views got better and better, and when we arrived I was happy to have come, if only for the beautiful surroundings.

Upon entering the retreat house I was immediately greeted by the welcoming sight of many smiling faces sitting around tables chatting and eating together. Usually it takes a bit of time for me to build up the courage to talk to complete strangers in these kinds of environments, but there was something in the air that made it very easy to approach everyone and introduce myself; it was just the thing to do it seemed! After some raucously fun and helpful 'get-to-know-you' sort of activities, we all took a mini-pilgrimage to the chapel of St Bertram, and said our evening prayers over the grave of this pre-schism saint. The air was thick with reverence, anticipation, excitement and love. The beautiful chanting in the cool dimly lit stone chapel, by a mass of young adults aglow in the candlelight with shimmering eyes and burning hearts, seemed to be the 'rock' upon which the conference took place. Throughout the rest of the weekend my mind went back to that evening, having not known very many of the faces at the time, but feeling such a sense of community with all of them as we all eagerly sang along when a familiar hymn or prayer would begin. The prayer that occurred throughout the weekend was like a blanket that encompassed all of the activities, clothing everything in an atmosphere of peace and sober joy (even though some moments bordered much more on the joyful side of things!).

We heard wonderful words of wisdom from Metropolitan Kallistos on the doctrine of the Trinity, Fr Raphael on the life and teachings of the contemporary Elder Porphyrios, Sr Magdalen on the monastic vocation, and Karen and Ian on married life. Someone commented on one of the talks saying that it just left you spiritually full, without having to wonder whether the context was trustworthy or not. This, I think, would be a good way of capturing the spirit of all of the talks. We were all so deeply touched by each of the presenters, presumably because of their desire to be real, and our receptiveness! The talks were supplemented by plenty of time for both organized and impromptu discussion, but it was clear that the young folks' hunger for the Truth and love and trust for the speakers and for one another created a fertile atmosphere for the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst! It was a joy also to be able to participate in many sing-alongs where the widest variety of tunes were sung (anything from classic rock to Georgian folk songs), as well as a talent show featuring storytelling, comic skits and some other great musical performances.

All in all, I can confidently say that between the walks in the magnificent English countryside, the inspirational talks, the fellowship and worship with peers of like interests and age, and most of all the openness of many people in attendance to receive instruction from Above (in whatever form it came), made the Youth Festival one of (if not) the best conferences I have ever been to. Yes, I admit it, even better than in the States! It confirmed my curiosity as to whether there are like-minded young folks in the UK, and more importantly demonstrated the importance of coming together in Christ's love to grow in our understanding of what it means to know and love Him, our neighbours and ourselves! Maybe one could say that the word 'fun' could describe the festival, or maybe 'fellowship' or 'joy', 'love', and 'laughter'; or perhaps it could be said that it was a success because of the strong planning committee. Of course it's difficult to pin point exactly what made it a 'success,' but it is clear that everyone's willingness to be present, vulnerable and prayerful created the best atmosphere or vessel for the Divine blessing – the holy stamp of success. But don't take my word for it. You'll just have to 'come and see' for yourself next year!

*Mike Tishel*

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Orthodox Youth Festival Organisers,

I am writing to thank you for organising what can only be described as the most enjoyable 'Youth Festival' I've ever attended. I say that without reservation. To have seen the richness of the Orthodox faith in its fullness that weekend was truly a blessing.

The talks were fantastic. What an honour to hear Metropolitan Kallistos teach about 'Living the Trinity', not to mention all the other great talks by our learned priests. I was blown away by the candour and generosity of Ian and Karen Bates, who shared their private stories and guided us through both difficult and joyous times in their relationship and family life. The small group workshops were also a treat, the 'boys' opened up to each other and discussed hard issues that concern their everyday lives as I'm sure the girls did also. Who could forget Sister Magdalen's wise words from the back of the room, gently steering the discussion back to the focal point of the weekend, the Word of God. These sessions made the morning and evening prayers and Divine Liturgy with the Metropolitan even more focussed and meaningful. Thank you.

All this was topped off with an absolutely amazing Festival Campsite (the glorious green hills and fresh air of the Peak District was a very welcome change to polluted London); great sporting activities; and fun night-time dancing and singing. The highlight, however, was forging new friendships with great people, whose company I'll cherish for many years to come! Thanks once again for organising such an enjoyable and fulfilling weekend and I'll be sure to bring friends along next year to witness what I was blessed to be part of.

Best Wishes

*Andrew Jabbour*

## **ORTHODOX FAMILY CAMP: SUMMER 2010**

The camp was held at Cefn Lea Lodge, in mid-Wales, in August 2010. Seven families attended, with children ranging from newborn to eight years old. We all shared one large wooden lodge, each family having their own bedroom, with meals and activities in a communal area. Fr Michael Harry and his wife Judy attended, Fr Michael providing excellent teaching and spiritual guidance, and Judy was also a key participant, with her warm, supportive, and insightful presence, and her seemingly endless supply of cakes and jams!

The camp started on Friday evening, and finished on Monday morning. This was the second camp our family had attended, and the fourth that has been held. Our family have found the camp to be a very positive experience, and feedback from others, and the fact that most of us have returned from previous years, suggests that this feeling is shared by other participants. This short article cannot attempt to capture all of the many positive comments made by both children and adults, but the following points are a sample of the views expressed:

### **A good mix of learning and play**

Claudia Behr, from my parish in Bristol, once said to me that ‘Orthodoxy is caught, not taught’. This camp was living proof of that maxim. The atmosphere of mutual support, respect and love which was shown between all the participants was worth a thousand formal sermons. Children are like sponges, absorbing the atmosphere around them. There was no formal instruction for the children, but they learnt so much from being in the atmosphere generated by the camp. The older children had the chance to participate in the reading of prayers, in the baking of prosphora, and in the Divine Liturgy. They participated in a prayerful way, and felt very involved in what was going on. This was so helpful in helping the children understand what is going on in services, and why we do what we do. Often when children are not involved they can become bored and alienated from services, so this kind of activity is, I think, a vital part of their education.

### **Overcoming ethnicity**

Sometimes Orthodox people can define themselves primarily with reference to their nationality, rather than to their Orthodox faith. Events like this are so important in showing the children that we are Orthodox first, and Greek / Russian/ English / etc second. In the words of the Creed: there is ‘One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church’. In our opinion, the camp is an important vehicle for the true integration of Orthodoxy into English life and culture, for the rooting of our faith in this native land. The camp shows the children that the local church is part of the wider international Church, and that all local Orthodox churches are One. It helps them see that they are not just part of a strange local sect, but part of the Universal Body of Christ. Again, this direct experience is worth many lectures.

### **Relationships with other denominations**

My wife, who is Roman Catholic, thoroughly enjoyed the camp, and felt very much at home. Other non-Orthodox have also attended. We do not try to hide the fact that there are differences between Orthodox and other Christians, but by the welcome we extend we want to express our desire live in harmony and mutual respect with them, in the Love of Christ.

We would highly recommend the camp to any family with children, it is an enriching experience for our faith and the faith of our children. In our opinion it is an important building block in developing the Orthodox Church in the UK.

*Cuthbert McGrath*

## **A PILGRIM'S DIGRESS**

### **Pilgrimage to Romania, 21-28 August 2010**

*Saturday 21 August*

We were a group of 12 pilgrims from different parts of England and one from France. We made their own travel plans to get to Romania and this seemed to have all gone smoothly. We were met in Romania by Ionut, our tour guide, and his wife Diana. The minibus that Ionut had arranged for us was perfectly adequate, a large ski compartment on the back had been converted for luggage, so there was plenty of room inside the minibus, and air conditioning and blaring Orthodox music. We were also met by the ubiquitous mother holding her daughter, persisting – against our resistance – for one dollar.

The journey to our first monastery was not hugely remarkable, but it was very encouraging to see a fair number of churches under construction. We arrived at the small hotel near Caramain monastery where we were greeted with slivovitz. After we found our rooms, we had an excellent feast, a meze starter with smoked cheese, cold meats and radishes. Followed by a mixed grill, pork, chicken, beef kebab, spicy sausage, countryside potatoes and very good local wine! We made a few formal introductions and then went to bed.

*Sunday 22 August*

The Caramain monastery was built around the mystic vision of a monk who saw the Mother of God in a tree. Around the tree they had built something like a 360 degree conservatory so people could pray there. I noticed local pilgrims writing their prayer requests and slipping them between the panels rather like the Jews tuck prayer requests into the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. There was also a small chapel and then a reasonably large church. The church was still under construction, or really still had some decoration to go. It contained very impressive mosaics, showing considerable skill by the Iconographer.

We went as a group to the end of Matins. After venerating the Gospel I stood near the front. My thinking was 'I don't want to get squashed in here' as there were already a lot punters and still more people milling around, while other pilgrims were more discreet and hid behind pillars. Anyway the upshot was that the deacon beckoned me into the Altar. There the Abbot presented me with an epitrachelion and told me to stand and pray. I said I wasn't a priest but was a sub-deacon but he still invited me to stand and pray there. There were four priests and one deacon. One of the priests, a Fr Gerontius, was very welcoming to me and invited himself to come and stay at my house!

It was very good for me to just stand and pray in the Altar. Usually I'm helping to get the censer going, boil water, light candles, martialing the server boys, so it felt nicely odd to just stand and pray. The inside of the Altar area was very beautiful without being cluttered. While they all processed out with the Gospel, I fired off a few snaps of the Altar area.

I wasn't offered communion, but they did invite me to the immediate after-feast of antidoron and two glasses of wine. One communion wine, nice and sweet, the other a local wine 'home brew', which I had to pretend was just as nice. At the end of the service they welcomed our group of pilgrims and thanked us for coming. We then had a three course lunch, and then an eight hour drive to the North.

On the way Fr Philip gave us a short talk to focus our thoughts on what it means to go on pilgrimage. The gist of it was that we are trying to follow Christ and to hear what he has to say to us. Therefore we need to filter out all of the beautiful things we see and hear, to find those points of encounter with our fellow pilgrims, the people we meet, and the things we see that contain Christ. My lasting memory from the day was the joy it brought to those priests to have a cleric

from England coming to visit them in their country, in a place of local importance rather than a popular pilgrimage destination.

#### *Monday 23 August*

After a loud night's sleep due to a wedding function in our hotel, we had a reasonable breakfast and then set out for Putna Monastery. Arriving there it was wonderful to see an icon above the main gate. Romania is made up of three ancient kingdoms of which Moldova is the northern one. Putna is a castle monastery and played a key role in the defence of Moldova under St Stephen the Great. The church inside was quite plain but beautiful nonetheless.

Fr Philip commented that he feels sad leaving such churches in case he never sees them again, but we both agreed that such churches will somehow feature in Heaven. We had a good guided tour by a very knowledgeable monk, well versed in the history of the monastery, but also the wider world and church matters. Stephen the Great came across as a particularly strong defender of the faith, and a man who found faith as he grew in life.

After Putna Monastery we visited the Putna Sisastra Monastery, which started as a hermitage of Putna Monastery I believe in 1996. It is a flourishing monastery with seven churches in a beautiful open area formed by the valley it rests in, with pine woods either side. If it hadn't been for the heat it would have been heaven on earth. This monastery was a particular favourite of our tour guide Ionut, and he was well known and loved there. We had a great lunch and served vespers there with Fr Philip (our pilgrimages chaplain) concelebrating. On the way back we visited a cave cell, one time habitation of St Stephen the Great's spiritual father. Quite an ascetic feat to live in a stone cave in sub-zero temperatures.

#### *Tuesday 24 August*

I got up early to go to the liturgy in our local monastery, called Sucevita. Went downstairs and found Mother Macrina (fellow pilgrim) and I were locked in. After a while Ionut came down and secured our release via mobile phone and the three of us went to the monastery. There, the first sight a stunning, huge fresco on the side of the church of the ladder of ascent based on the story by St John Climacus. It was very special to share communion in that monastery, and as a result I felt more connected to that monastery than any of the others.

After breakfast we went to the Moldavita Monastery. The scheme of the frescoes at the apse focused on Christ, with the unexpected representation of Lamb and Flag. On the north side were various scenes including the Root of Jesse leading up to Christ, the siege of Constantinople complete with canons and scenes of the life of the Mother of God. There was a small museum with a very important Psalter. The monastery at one time had contained a calligraphy school, and the psalms had been translated into Romanian.

We then drove back to Sucevita Monastery, where we had another fantastic lunch, with local white wine. We lunched in a beautiful room where they host bishops and other dignitaries. The main features of the monastery's frescos were the ladder, as mentioned, and the root of Jesse again. I was personally very pleased with an icon of Christ with a scroll, which he was tearing but couldn't completely sever, showing that the Old Testament cannot be parted from the New.

#### *Wednesday 25 August*

In the morning we visited Voronet Monastery, another of the painted monasteries; its base colour was blue, which was translated to us as copper sulphate but I think it was actually cobalt. Its distinctive features were the lives of St Nicholas and St George and a fantastic Last Judgement on the back wall. Inside, there was very old furniture, and the restoration of furniture and frescoes was underway. I bought a few trinkets and probably a family icon from outside of a market stall.

We journeyed on, taking pictures of peasant life and haystacks and made an impromptu visit to a church of St Hilarion. This is a hugely significant church as it was built in communist times by

a well revered priest. It was a real mixture artistically in that it had stained glass windows depicting saints in the Anglican style, a Roman Catholic style iconostasis, and Orthodox frescoes. Also a splendid chandelier made from antlers.

Eventually we arrived at Neamt Monastery, famed for being where Fr Paisius collated and translated the *Philokalia* into Slavonic. It had at one time been the chief monastery of Moldova and had had printing presses. It had a much earlier foundation than the other monasteries we visited, and was also patronised by St Stephen the Great. The central church was not painted on the outside, and on the inside we saw how tough the work of fresco restoration is.

There was an interesting tale of an unknown saint whose body came up through the pathway. One rumour goes that it could have been the body of St Paisius hidden so that the Russians wouldn't pinch his relics. We served a Panikida in the Ossuary with the skulls of the monks around us. We enjoyed simpler accommodation, but perfectly adequate.

#### *Thursday 26 August*

Had to crack the whip a bit today. We had a good breakfast including fried eggs. The carp soaked in vinegar not only brought tears to the eyes, but also sent a shiver down the spine!

On arrival at Sihastra Monastery, there was a liturgy taking place which some pilgrims attended. Bec and I did a little shopping and then went exploring. The monastery had a lovely, light, airy feel again, set in a beautiful valley. We then had a lengthy talk about the monastery and Elder Cleopa. One of the chapels, of which they were justly proud, had been painted by a Belarussian in a Catholic style. The iconographer fasted each day till 4pm while he did his painting. His second wife also lived in the monastery. The first had run off with another man in Belarussia, so theirs was a 'white marriage', and both were professed as monastics prior to their deaths. We visited Elder Cleopa's cell which, while not tiny, was not big. Approximately 2.5 metres square, it was filled with icons and photos, some of his clothing and notably his boots. We also visited the cemetery, where it is known miracles take place at his grave.

We stopped at Secu Monastery, where we got upgraded for lunch by our driver Florin. We then went to Agapia Monastery, a community of 300 nuns. This was replete with flower pots with beautiful red flowers. The quadrangle of the monastery was surrounded by the village in which the nuns lived.

#### *Friday 27 August*

Just before midnight, nine of us went up to a skete linked with Neamt Monastery. This was a bumpy 4k drive in cars that haven't even heard of the existence of an MOT. There was a full moon and it was obviously a very beautiful area. We did the Midnight Office then Matins, and then the Liturgy. Fr Philip took the place of the Protos, but really Hieromonk Ambrozie conducted things.

We were also joined by two priests from Galats, a district in the south, who were running a children's camp at the skete. The children provided the choir and they loved it and their singing was great. The priests did a lot of chatting afterwards, and Fr Philip was given four different relics. We didn't get to leave till 5am. The last day was spent travelling, and we had a farewell dinner in the evening.

At the beginning of the pilgrimage, Fr Philip asked us to think about what we should take away from the pilgrimage, but I can't help thinking that we gave far more.

Joy – We are probably the first English clerics that the priests there have ever seen, and thanks also to the conduct and decorum of our pilgrims they now know that we take Orthodoxy seriously and are fully Orthodox. To see the joy dawning in their hearts that there are Orthodox people in England was beautiful to behold. We made their cups run over with joy. In total we have been at the Liturgy with eight priests who now have a very positive view of us. Two of them may quite

possibly never see or serve with another English priest again in their earthly lives. It is an honour to be used thus in God's service.

My great thanks to the Fellowship for its support for our pilgrimage, especially to its work of *Forerunner*, and the website for attracting pilgrims.

*Deacon Dionysius James Higgs*

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PILGRIMAGE TO THE SAINTS OF BARKING** **Parish of St Helen of Colchester, 13 March 2010**

On a windy day in March this year, the Parish of St Helen of Colchester organised what we believe to be the first formal Orthodox pilgrimage to the saints of Barking. It took place within the ruins of Barking Abbey at the Church of England Parish Church of St Margaret of Antioch, Barking. We were indebted to the parish church for letting us use their facilities and their church. We had pilgrims from Colchester, the monastery of St John the Baptist at Tolleshunt Knights, Southend, London, Hertfordshire and as far away as Norfolk.

As an Orthodox parish in Essex, we regularly commemorate the saints of Barking as local saints. Indeed, they are commemorated at every Matins service in the Great Intercession, as some of the Orthodox saints of this land. Although many people now consider Barking to be a part of London – it is part of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham – Barking is in fact on the eastern side of the River Lea (or Lee), which marks the ancient boundary between Middlesex and Essex. The saints of Barking are therefore saints of Essex, but can also be considered saints of London.

St Erkenwald, the Light of London, founded the monastery at Barking, dedicated to the Mother of God. He installed his sister, St Ethelburga, as the first abbess, assisted by St Theogirth, who took care of the novices. St Ethelburga was succeeded as abbess by St Hildelith. These holy women shone forth as examples of spirituality and piety in Barking, and the reputation of the monastery grew.

Other women came to learn and then went to establish places of holiness elsewhere, including St Cuthburga and St Quenburga, who were at Barking and then founded the monastery at Wimborne in Dorset. St Wulfhild was a later abbess, and when the monastery was attacked by the Danes, those nuns of Barking who were killed were considered martyrs. Both St Aldhelm and St Boniface praised the monastery at Barking, which was eventually dedicated to the Mother of God and to St Ethelburga.

At our pilgrimage, Fr Alexander Haig gave us a much more detailed account of the lives and spiritual works of the saints of Barking, and we celebrated with a service to the saints on Saturday morning and Great Vespers for Sunday in the afternoon in what was once part of the monastery, although now a ruin. I was singing in the choir, using the words of the service for the Synaxis of the Saints of Barking, which had been written for the pilgrimage. It has beautiful descriptions of the saints and how they inspired people to follow their examples in the Orthodox faith. During the service, one pilgrim noted how the birds perched along the top of the church roof, quietened down and seemed to be listening to the service.

It was so good to have such a geographical spread of pilgrims, and it reminded us of the importance of celebrating these Orthodox saints of the early centuries. I think everyone felt that we must repeat the pilgrimage, and perhaps make it an annual event. London is such a vast city – perhaps an annual pilgrimage in its midst would help provide a new 'Light of London', just as St Erkenwald did so many years ago. We are hoping to commission an icon of the saints of Barking,

to be a focus for prayer to these saints who shone forth in Essex and the whole of the British Isles. I hope that many more people will join us on the next pilgrimage.

Holy Mother of God, save us! St Erkenwald the Light of London, St Ethelburga, St Theogirth, St Hildelith, St Wulfhild and all the Saints of Barking, pray to God for us!

*Margaret Haig*

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Made in the Image of God**

*Don't miss this year's Orthodox Festival (for 18-35 years~ish!)*

*29th April - 2nd May 2011*

**At Dovedale House, Ilam, in the beautiful surroundings of the Peak District National Park**

**The Festival aims to provide a meeting place for young people**

- to rediscover and strengthen our faith together;
- to share the practical experience of Orthodox life;
- to receive practical teaching in areas of relevance for young people;
- to encourage us to take an active role in the Church;
- to exchange fresh ideas between parishes;
- to strengthen links between young people in different parishes.

Discussion groups will cover topics important for our daily lives as Orthodox Christians, with opportunities to ask the questions you always wanted answered. Talks by learned members of the Church will aim to teach us about our faith. Lots of entertainment is provided, and there is opportunity to visit the beautiful surrounding countryside. The festival is open and relevant to young people aged 18-35. It is a wonderful opportunity to meet and make new friends from a diverse range of Orthodox backgrounds.

Go to **[www.orthodoxyouth.co.uk](http://www.orthodoxyouth.co.uk)** for more information.

## FELLOWSHIP PUBLICATIONS

### *CALENDAR & LECTIONARY 2011*

#### **According to the Revised Julian (New Style) Calendar**

This publication, *published in early December 2010* by the Orthodox Fellowship of Saint John the Baptist, gives Scripture readings and an extensive list of saints for each day. Different traditions are represented, including Greek, Russian, Serbian, Romanian and that of Western Europe, especially Britain.

**Single copies of the *Calendar* - £3.50 each**

**Six or more copies - £2.75 each**

*All post free*

### *DIRECTORY OF ORTHODOX PARISHES & CLERGY IN BRITAIN & IRELAND 2011*

This booklet, *published in late January 2011* by the Orthodox Fellowship of Saint John the Baptist, gives the time and place of services at places of Orthodox worship throughout Britain and Ireland, and also lists names and contact details of the clergy.

**Please note the increase in the price of the *Directory*!**

**Single copies of the *Directory* are now £4.00 each**

**Six or more copies of the *Directory* are now £3.25 each**

*All post free*

**(Details – [bjg1@waitrose.com](mailto:bjg1@waitrose.com))**

**Copies of the *Calendar* and the *Directory* can be obtained  
from the Fellowship at**

**26 Denton Close, Oxford OX2 9BW**

## EVENTS CALENDAR

Dates	What's happening?	For more information contact:
Sat 20 Nov	<b>Orthodox Christian Music Festival</b> Holy Sepulchre Church, St Anne's, Northampton 7.00 – 11.00 pm	See the events calendar: <a href="http://www.ofsjb.org">www.ofsjb.org</a>
Sat 27 Nov	<b>Conference in memory of Metropolitan Antony of Sourozh</b> London	<b>Metropolitan Antony of Sourozh Foundation</b> 01869 347 457 or email: <a href="mailto:mafoundationconf@live.com">mafoundationconf@live.com</a>
Fri 28 Jan – Sun 2 Feb	<b>OFSJB Study Weekend</b> 'The Song of Songs: Reflections on Divine Love' St Theosevia House, Oxford Leaders: Dr Mangala Frost & Dr Andreas Andreopoulos	See the events calendar: <a href="http://www.ofsjb.org">www.ofsjb.org</a> or the booking form in this <i>Forerunner</i>
Fri 29 April – Mon 2 May	<b>Orthodox Youth Festival</b> 'Made in the Image of God' Ilam, Derbyshire	<a href="http://www.orthodoxyouth.co.uk">www.orthodoxyouth.co.uk</a>
Sat 30 April	<b>Iona Orthodox Retreat</b>	Contact: Reader Ignatios Bacon. Oratory of the Theotokos and St Cumein, Bunoich, Kilchuimen, Inverness-shire. PH32 4DG. Email: <a href="mailto:ionaorthodox@googlemail.com">ionaorthodox@googlemail.com</a>
22-24 July	<b>OFSJB Annual Conference</b> 'Orthodox Witness Today' High Leigh Conference Centre, Hertfordshire	See the events calendar: <a href="http://www.ofsjb.org">www.ofsjb.org</a>

**Orthodox Christian Youth: [orthodoxyouth.co.uk](http://orthodoxyouth.co.uk).**

Facebook: **Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist (youth)**

**Midland Orthodox Study Centre (MOSC):** Courses are run on the second Saturday of every month except July and August.

See the Events Calendar on the Fellowship website: [www.ofsjb.org](http://www.ofsjb.org)

or contact [anthony-davis@leopard-insolvency.co.uk](mailto:anthony-davis@leopard-insolvency.co.uk).

**Institute of Orthodox Studies (IOCS):** For details of courses, email:

[info@iocs.cam.ac.uk](mailto:info@iocs.cam.ac.uk) or see the website: [www.iocs.cam.ac.uk](http://www.iocs.cam.ac.uk)

**Orthodox Youth Choir** (how to join, practice dates and performances):

Contact [anna\\_conomos@hotmail.com](mailto:anna_conomos@hotmail.com), [mariamni@yahoo.com](mailto:mariamni@yahoo.com)

**Greek Orthodox Youth in Great Britain (GOYGB) events:**

Contact [olga\\_goygb@yahoo.com](mailto:olga_goygb@yahoo.com)