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Puritans, Pagans, and Pudding

For better or for worse, that which is considered “Canadian Christmas” is an inheritance of Anglo-Protestantism, bearing with it much of the Orthodox inheritance of one thousand years ago. The popular use of the Christmas tree is a case in point: this Christianized pagan tradition brings into our homes a natural symbol of everlasting life - the evergreen tree - presenting it for us to honour by our decoration, a reflection of the Life-Giving Tree of the Cross. Christmas gift-giving, where we lay our treasures at the foot of the Tree, reflects our imitation of the Magi from the East, whose memory we commemorate on the feast of the Nativity.

The pagan roots of so many Christmas customs are all but forgotten by most of us, and rightly so. They have been filtered through centuries of practice in the lives of saints, and so come to us sanctified, not by some ideology or isolated interpretation of scripture, but by the experience of holy people. This is the very reason that Serbian Orthodox continue to decorate the *badnjak* tree - the Balkan yule log - and burn it in a marvelous bonfire on Christmas eve, commemorating (often without knowing it) the rejection by their ancestors of the worship of the pagan god Badnjak, and their embracing of faith in Christ. While these Christian roots have been obscured by the sheer joy of drinking warm plum brandy outside on a cold winter evening, the evident Christian universality of the practice can't be lost on anyone whose ancestors turned from paganism to Christ. The baptism of all of Europe, the Mediterranean, and most of Africa has produced near-exact parallels in experience, which make the strange relic of



badnjak-burning strikingly relevant for all Orthodox Christians today.

The pagan roots of Christmas customs have been filtered through centuries of experience of holy people.

Yet there are those who would seek to “clean up” this inheritance, to scrub it free of anything that bears a trace of pagan roots, to reconstruct Orthodox Christian practice along protestant lines - and quite ignorant protestant lines at that. Even Martin Luther, who re-popularized the use of the Christmas tree, recognized the potency of ancient rituals, which were baptized by filling them with Christian purpose and content. This is the very reason Saint Patrick used the clovers that covered Ireland to explain the Holy Trinity: the clover brought with it the weight of pagan spiritual significance, which when properly redefined within the norms of the Church, was powerfully effective in the conversion of the Irish. We see this again and

again with the use of the *ankh* in Egypt, the blessed greenery at Pentecost, and the blessing of wheat in memory of the dead.


Such is the case with the Christmas pudding, or “plum” pudding, as it is sometimes erroneously called. The roots of this sweet dish are lost in the mists of time, but its association with holly, luck, and good omens strongly suggest pre-Christian origins. Yet it is the Christianized use of the dish that has found its way to contemporary tables, or at least to the references in Christmas carols, heard until recently in Canadian schools. Like the symbolic number of twelve dishes on Ukrainian Orthodox tables on the eve of Nativity, the Christmas pudding has thirteen ingredients, for Christ and His disciples. A sprig of holly tops the pudding, in honour of Christ’s crown of thorns, and the whole brandy-soaked dish is set alight as a symbol of the Lord’s Passion. Even the preparation of the dish - stirred from east to west, in memory of the movement of the Magi - speaks to the deep Christianization of our heritage. Thankfully, this heritage is still part of the Christmas memory of Canadians who have not been overtaken by trips to the shopping mall as the major source of symbolic pilgrimage in celebration of the birth of Christ.

Like so many other good things, the Christmas pudding was outlawed by the English Puritans, as far too rich and far too pagan in origin for their own squeaky-clean reconstruction of pseudo-Christian life. It was not until the time of Queen Victoria, at the urging of her German husband, Prince Albert, that the Christmas pudding was reintroduced, along with the Christmas tree (Queen Victoria had one in each room, decorated in blue and gold, her favourite colours). As Canadians, we have these Anglo-Germans to thank for reviving the authentic Christian symbolism in Christmas celebrations still part of Canadian life today.

We watched, knowing that something ancient and significant transpired each year on that Christmas table, something whose meaning was beyond all of us.

I can still recall from childhood, the moment when my grandfather would light the Christmas pudding, bathed in brandy, the silent room as the younger ones watched in wonder as the precious offering burned with the Light of Christ’s Passion. Of course, we did not know the meaning of any of this, since it had already been obscured by history and the secularism that has now all but engulfed the celebration of the birth of Christ for the bulk of Canadians. Still, we watched, knowing that something ancient and significant transpired each year on that Christmas table, something whose meaning was beyond all of us.

In this tiny flame burned the inheritance of the ancient Christian tradition, delivered to us children, unknowingly. And it is this same flame, this same inheritance, which must guide us in the west, as we seek to reconnect with the ancient, authentic witness of the Orthodox Christian Faith. No clever imitations, contrived in the kitchens of modern minds, can be a substitute for this inheritance, tested by time and the witness of generations of faithful. Without these, we are alone, seeking to stand on our own

human wisdom, rather than walking in the path of the saints, who even in the simplicity of the Christmas table, manifested Christ in every action, where every act was a prayer, every green bough was a symbol of the Resurrection, and every flame pointed to the Uncreated Light of Christ. 

Terrorism, Airlines, and the Mission of Saint John

“If I go up into heaven, Thou art there...” - Psalm 138(9):8

For much of Church history, Saint Nicholas has held a special place in the hearts of the faithful from every place, including his unique place as patron of travelers, particularly seafarers. For the modern commuter, the holy Prophet Elias (Elijah), who was taken into Heaven in a chariot of fire, is an intercessor whose prayers should be more frequently invoked for safe travel by automobile (this is one reason many Orthodox faithful have their cars blessed on the summertime feastday of the Prophet Elias).

Although gasoline prices command the intermittent attention of the millions who travel by car, no one with access to the media can escape the inevitable attention given to air travel in the age of international terrorism. Just as air travel has opened up immigration, and the increasing internationalization of most countries in the world, so too has it become the focus of those who would tear down bridges, and replace them with walls. International terrorism is about much more than disrupting travel or making political inroads: it is about imposing one cultural worldview - even one language - on the whole world, in the form of religion.

Only two world religions - Christianity and Islam - might make the claim to be faiths for all people, for all cultures. Yet the realities of international terrorism - Islamic terrorism that follows in the same pattern as its founder - put the lie to any claim that Islam has multicultural aims. Islam has always been the vehicle for exporting the supremacy of one culture - the Quraish tribe of seventh century Arabia - whose norms and values it encapsulates. Whether in its militant or moderate forms, Islam remains a religion which holds one language (Arabic) as the language of Heaven, and esteems one culture (the Arab culture) above all others in the eyes of Heaven. International terrorism is but a blunt expression of the meanderings of over a millennium of Islamic history.

Christianity expresses the opposite of this cultural-religious imperialism. From the witness of the first apostles, we see a mission to the Gentiles, a mission to all nations in which travel - not military campaigns - became a vehicle for evangelism. Contacts with other cultures became a means of integrating the

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Christian faith in a new land, without compromising the inherited tradition of the saints. And integrate the saints did: Saint Paul became a Gentile for the Gentiles; Saint Nina laid the roots of the Church in Georgia, quite distinct from any Hellenization. The Ethiopian mission absorbed the art, music, and Judaic inheritance of that land, while Saint Cyril penned a new written language for the Slavs, in order that their Christian life might be preserved not in Greek, but in their native languages (many say this is the reason the Slavs remained Orthodox, rather than uni-cultural Latin Christians). It is said that the prince of Rus, Saint Vladimir, finally chose Orthodox Christianity over Islam, not simply because of the splendour of the Liturgy at Constantinople, but also because the mullahs would forbid members of his court to drink wine - an unthinkable strangeness in Slavic culture, but a *pro forma* requirement for those who would emulate the Arabic Quraish.

It is no accident that the roads pagan Rome used to conquer nations and Romanize them, became for Saint Paul and others the avenues for *Christianization*, an effort to transform a culture from within, rather than imposing a new and artificial culture from without. Just as Christ transfigures each person beginning with the spiritual heart, so too, real Christian mission travels to other cultures to bring them, as they are, to the fullness of what they are, in Christ. Come to Christ as what you are, Saint Paul tells us, and become *more* than you are now (1 Cor. 7:17-24).

We should remember Saint John Maximovich not only as a great saint of North America, but also as patron of air travel, and of the many immigrants and refugees who, like him, seek refuge on Canadian shores.

The advent of international air travel, and multicultural communities, provide all sorts of complications to life in the modern world, especially in the West. But for Orthodox Christians, the speed of travel provides one great opportunity: crossing cultures with the Gospel of Christ at a rate never experienced since the Tower of Babel. The acceleration of Orthodox missions in places like Africa, the Philippines, Indonesia, and China, must give one pause when one considers the Lord's words, "*This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to the nations, and then the end will come.*" (Matt. 24:14). Thirty years ago, many Orthodox would have thought this referred to the work of the Gideons Bible Society; now we're waking up to the reality that the Lord was actually referring to us doing the preaching, and to all nations becoming *Orthodox* Christians.

In 1966, Saint John Maximovich, the first glorified saint to ever travel by air, reposed in San Francisco, where his incorrupt and miracle-working relics rest to this day. His life was essentially a travelogue of missionary work to a dozen different cultures and languages: Russians, Serbs, French, Dutch, Philipinos, Chinese, Dutch, and North Americans of all cultural backgrounds. It was Saint John who made widely known the plight of Orthodox Christians in the Far East. It was Saint John who insisted on the

reintroduction of Orthodox saints of the West onto the calendar of the Russian Church. It was Saint John who laboured to establish and strengthen indigenous Orthodox churches in each of the countries he visited - not Russian imports for non-Russians, but rather the fullness of Orthodox life, within the context of the culture in which he found himself. It is said that these efforts made such an impact on him, that by the end of his life, he enjoyed (perhaps even preferred?) serving the Divine Liturgy in Mandarin Chinese. (One Russian Canadian woman who knew the saint in Shanghai in his early days spoke of his discomfort with using the Chinese language; here again, we see the growth of God's grace as even the saints labour in love to reach out beyond themselves, thereby growing in grace).

Perhaps as we celebrate the feast of Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco each Canada Day weekend (Old Style Church Calendar), we should remember him not only as a great saint of North America, but also as patron of air travel, and of the many immigrants and refugees who, like him, seek refuge on North American shores. For in this we will find the essence of the thing that sets Orthodox Christianity apart from all other religious claims: it is the Faith which is itself a citizenship above nation, whose Communion unites those divided by time, space, and culture, and the spread of which is an opportunity Saint John has, by his prayers, laid at our very doorstep. ❁

Caroling and Public Schools

To the elites who have spent the last two decades or more trying to expunge Christianity from public schools, take note: it's been tried before, and it failed.

From 1558 to the early 19th century, Roman Catholics in

England were severely curtailed in the public practice of their religion; i.e. Public displays of traditional Christian symbols, images of saints and their veneration, and the public observance of feast days, was officially quashed by civil authorities. The traditional Christmas carol, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, was written during this period by Roman Catholics as a secret teaching tool instruct children in the meaning of the Christian faith. The carol was devised to get the message across without upsetting the Protestants.


In the carol, the Christian receives from his True Love (the Lord), a partridge in a pear tree (Christ, born of the Virgin Mary). Two turtle doves (the Old and New Testaments) proclaim his arrival, along with three French hens (faith, hope, and love) and four calling birds (the evangelists).

Other references are equally symbolic: five golden rings (the first five books of the Bible); six geese a-laying (the six days of creation); seven swans a-swimming (the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 12:9-11, Rom. 12, Eph. 4 and 1 Peter 4:10-11); eight maids a-milking (the beatitudes); nine ladies dancing (the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23); ten



lords a-leaping (the ten commandments); eleven pipers piping (the eleven faithful disciples); and twelve drummers drumming (the twelve points of the [Apostles] creed).

Ironically, this is one of those carols which has usually made it through the censors' filter as a "neutral" piece of holiday fare. In the age of political correctness, perhaps there is something to be learned from this technique, which has endured five centuries of attack, but which still endures as a declaration of the Gospel, in a manner which even today echoes the secret "codeword" greetings of the early martyrs.

One only wonders what form our secret greetings will take. 

The Great Blessing of Waters: From Sea to Sea

"He shall have dominion from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth" - Psalm 72(71):8

For all its land, Canada is dominated by water. Two coasts have welcomed immigrants: immigrants who have often traveled by water from water dependant nations, such as those of Southeast Asia and the North Atlantic, to settle in new maritime homes. Our east and west coasts today resemble the skylines of Scotland and Hong Kong, respectively, with diets fed from the fruit thereof. It is no coincidence that one Canadian province is named New Scotland, and that Chinese boat races are a major event in Vancouver. We are water people, east and west.

For those living away from the coasts, water has also been the lifeblood - and sometimes the bringer of destruction - to life in our fair land. It was the waters of the St. Lawrence that formed the highway of commerce in our early history, along with Hudson's Bay. The Great Lakes formed the frame of the necklace which would boast the largest concentration of families, farmers, and industrialists in the country. The rivers of the prairies would become critical bringers of life in their abundant harvests, but would also visit doom in time of drought or flooding.

And in the north, whole cultures existed and exist around the waters that interconnect them, waters which offered a conduit for missionaries like Sts. Juvenaly and Innocent and their companions in the north, even to the Yukon Territory. Like the highways of Rome, water was the means by which the Gospel first penetrated the far north of our continent, planting roots which still flourish today.

Canada boasts one of the largest fresh water supplies in the world, so it is no surprise that the sale of water came to dominate the Free Trade debate of the late 1980s. Water was once again a defining feature of Canadian culture and history.


Despite division by two calendars of the celebration of the Lord's Theophany, Orthodox Christians in Canada are in a unique position to witness and serve at the Great Blessing of Waters, on the shores of waters that reach across most of the world. Just as Our Lord entered and sanctified the waters of the Jordan River at His baptism, so too can the Church today extend this sanctification, even simultaneously, across the largest land mass in the world, from Pacific British Columbia (touching the Alaskan Orthodox heartland of North America, as well as Russia), to the Atlantic provinces (touching the European roots of Canada, and

the Mediterranean roots of the Orthodox Faith), to the waters of the north, down to the rivers feeding the lakes, small and Great, in the south.

Regrettably, because of the winter cold and the general unwillingness of Canadians to stand beside a chilly lake in January, the Great Blessing of Waters is usually served indoors, within the nave of the church - the nave itself being a symbol of the great Ark of our Salvation. Yet for those brave souls who would venture outside to the bodies of waters that refresh our land, we dip the Holy Cross into the same same Jordan River today, once again sanctified by Christ, now in our land.

If Canadians can gather together in the cold for sporting events, sleigh rides, and those parades honouring a caricature of Saint Nicholas, why not for marching down to the nearest body of water on the Feast of Theophany?

If Canadians can gather together in the cold with hot chocolate and coffee - the quintessential posture of our countrymen for sporting events, sleigh rides, and those parades honouring a caricature of Saint Nicholas - would it not make sense for Orthodox in Canada to do a very Canadian thing, and march down to the nearest body of water on the Feast of Theophany, and ask the Lord's blessing on it? What better way is there to reclaim the waters of our land for Christ, waters He created, waters He parted, waters through which He brought the Ark when they covered the whole face of the earth, waters in which He was Himself baptized, and in which we are baptized, too?

One priest opined that we should be blessing the local civic reservoirs, so that the blessed water might flow through the taps of our city water systems. Whatever the waters we may bless, let us be bold about reclaiming Canadian waters for Christ, not in a post-modern neopagan environmentalists sense, but in the same sense intended by the founders of our nation, who prayed that Christ would have His Dominion, from sea to sea. 

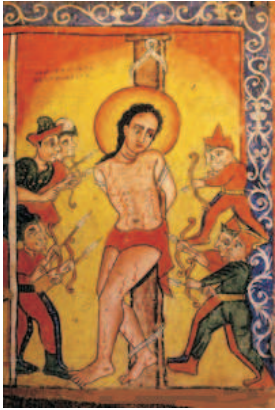
Canadian Orthodox Martyrs?

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church

- Tertullian

From the earliest times, a vast number of those who have come to make their home in Canada have been seeking a better life, free from the struggles and deprivations of their former homeland. With perhaps the exception of the earliest Celtic monastics who touched our shores, this quest for a better, safer life has been the rule: the natives crossing the landbridge from Asia seeking a more reliable source of food, the Vikings who sought "Vinland" (the land of wine), the early explorers seeking an income in furs, and the waves of immigrants fleeing foreign wars and poverty. Even

our Loyalist ancestors, who were willing to fight and die for their king and country, found security in the fact that king and country stood as a bulwark against revolution: a passport to future security and safety.



It is little wonder that as Orthodox North Americans, we tend to look at the great missionary saints and apostles to our land as remarkable heroes, who are in fact quite *unlike* us. Here we find examples like Saints Herman and Juvenaly who voluntarily gave up safe, relatively secure lives, to face the unknown challenges of mission work in an unknown land. Most of the saints of this land have similar stories, which stand in sharp contrast to the immigrant motivation that shaped and still shaped the Canadian identity:

Canada is a safe place, where one can avoid major struggles, and eke out a quiet existence in polite neighbourliness within a diverse populace, knowing that others are doing the same thing.

The epic saga *The Lord of the Rings* presents this contrast nicely. While the heroes - Frodo and his friend Sam - risk their lives for the safety and salvation of others, most of their kinsmen back in the Hobbit country view their self-sacrifice as dangerous and strange, albeit admirable. It is much safer and prudent to simply remain in our holes, they tell their children, awaiting whatever might face us, than to actually sacrifice ourselves for others (or even risk our lives in order to save them). Thus, they live a variant of the old saying, "Better dead, than to get out of bed".

A recent conference of the Russian Church Abroad in Australia raised the question of why mission work in far-off nations produces tens of thousands of baptisms, while North American mission work produces so few. The conference identified a genuine lack of apostolic spirit in the West.

The hobbit-like Canadian existence has formed our missionary approach as well. A recent conference of the Russian Church Abroad in Australia raised the question of why mission work in far-off nations produces tens of thousands of baptisms, while North American mission work produces so few. The conference identified a genuine lack of apostolic spirit in the West. While there are a number of clergy and faithful who do display this apostolic spirit of self-sacrifice, for the most part, Orthodox life is characterized by extreme parochialism. One could ask the following questions of a parish: When is the last time visitors were invited to learn about the Orthodox faith? What ongoing commitment of funds and people does a community contribute to sharing the Gospel, and Christ's Holy Church? Or is this "witness"

limited to food festivals, which like the festivals in Hobbit country, produce superb fireworks, which sparkle for an instant, then fade away.

The Church has historically experienced real growth only in times of persecution and martyrdom (mass baptism of nations being the notable exception). Barring the mass baptism of Canadians (or more accurately, a collection of different Canadian cultural communities), we must ask where this reality puts us. Are Canadians really in a position where martyrs could be produced, or would produced? Even in cases where the faithful were faced not with death for Christ, but with suffering or even social ostracism for Christ, we cannot be particularly optimistic about the harvest of martyrs or confessors we would see in Canada.

As Canadians tire of the emptiness of the car culture, and the spiritual vacuum of the shopping mall, they are drawn back to the Church in remarkable ways.


How do we know this? Historically, the Orthodox immigration has been very eager to fit into the increasingly secularized Protestant civil culture, looking, speaking, dressing, and living like other "mainstream" Canadians. Too often, the goals of Orthodox today, whether Canadian- or foreign-born, are virtually indistinguishable from those of secular Canadians. In nearly all cases, these goals centre around securing the comforts of our hobbit-holes, and minding our own business - a direct contradiction of the apostolic edict to *go* and baptize *all nations*.

Where might we start? It makes sense to begin at the heart of living the Orthodox life, which emulates Christ in pouring out our selfishness, in order to win salvation. Fasting, prayer and Holy Confession are at the heart of this question. So is tithing - that is, literal tithing, of ten percent of our income, in order to break down in a small way our obsession with securing our own comforts. The measure of our trust in God is really found right here: do we believe that Christ will take care of us, as He said He would do, or is it all up to us? If in fact the Lord proved to be a liar, and is not going to be around to save us, our own efforts to protect our comfortable little patch are destined for failure. Either we trust Christ enough to join Him and humble ourselves to Him for the sake of all, or we don't, and we're going to lose it all anyway.

The reality for many Orthodox parishes in Canada is an inward-looking one, which cares very much indeed for the preservation of culture, language, dance, and recipes, and little with sharing the Orthodox Faith. There is little martyrdom to be found here, with the exception of a remnant of bright and faithful witnesses in the midst of a corrupt generation. Heritage language programs might remain intact, but the grandchildren are lost from the Orthodox Faith. The statistics of many Canadian Orthodox parishes tell the tale.

Yet the tale is not over. As Canadians tire of the emptiness of the car culture, and the spiritual vacuum of the shopping mall, they are drawn back to the Church in remarkable ways, often despite (rather than because of) the approach of many Orthodox. Perhaps

the Lord is once again raising up witnesses from the very stones, the building blocks that make up Canadian culture, in order to live and share the Gospel with all nations, resident within our borders.

Signs of such life are evident across the continent, and for this, we must give glory to God, and continue to pray for such grace. For short of a national catastrophe, martyrdom in Canada seems an unlikely upcoming event, and the path of the Confessors of Canada, a much more reasonable one to expect. 

Telling the Truth in Istanbul: *1054 All Over Again?*

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

Media coverage of the recent visit by Benedict XVI to Istanbul illustrated vividly the great gap between popular illusion and Christian reality.

For instance, consider the repeated references to Patriarch Bartholomew as “spiritual leader of the world’s Orthodox Christians”. For the ninety percent of Orthodox Christians not under the jurisdiction of the bishop in Istanbul, this seemed as strange as describing the American president as the Leader of North America. Clearly, the Patriarch lays claim to an ancient see, one which is now numerically bereft of faithful, but which still claims jurisdiction over all Orthodox in so-called “barbarian lands” (apparently places like Russia, the United States, and Canada).

This claim to a kind of semi-universal authority is propped up by supporters in the West, who emblazon the Patriarchal standard on their letterheads, but who do not muster the energy to advocate a return to the monarchy of the Byzantine Empire which gave the Patriarch his title in the first place. Even in its far-flung holdings in Europe, Canada, and the United States, the Orthodox who are under the Patriarchate of Constantinople are in speedy decline, a result of low birth rates and severely limited mission work.

It is of course the mystique of this office, not the realities, which make her worthy of a visit by the Roman Catholic leader. Without question, Benedict XVI is the magnet of media attention around the world. It is this mythology of the Patriarchal office - a mythology paralleling the Roman Catholic claim to the universal authority of one bishop - which makes the Latin “vicar of Christ” so eager for “ecumenical” dialogue, and eventually, eucharistic union.

The bishop in Istanbul is somehow seen by Rome as the key to this unity, and the Patriarch is eager to oblige. Life in Turkey has not been easy for the Orthodox minority and their local spiritual leader (for so he is, like any bishop in his home city). Numerous assassination attempts, coupled with micromanagement of patriarchal affairs by the Turkish government, make it easy to understand the reasons one would welcome media attention in the Phanar (the enclosure that houses the Patriarchal offices). It is much more difficult to lob molotov cocktails through the back window of the Phanar while the Papal motorcade is parked outside. This is at least part of the reason the Roman Catholic leader was greeted at the Phanar by the singing of “Many Years”

by the Patriarchal chanters, a practice strictly reserved for visiting Orthodox bishops. Apparently, they were especially happy to see him.

The flattery at the thought that one Orthodox bishop’s relationship with Rome provides the key to some kind of Orthodox-Catholic union is particularly seductive.

This is of course the very thing which makes the visit of Benedict XVI such a temptation. Just as in 1054, when the prospect of one, all-powerful bishop who would protect the Church made the West bow the knee to Rome, it is now increasingly apparent that His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew finds great comfort in the friendship of the Roman Catholic leader. The added flattery at the thought that the unique position of one Orthodox bishop’s relationship with Rome provides the key to some kind of Orthodox-Catholic union is particularly seductive.

In reality, the influence of the Patriarchal throne is limited and waning. Most Orthodox Christians worldwide are either under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow, or of some other independent jurisdictions. Sadly, and somewhat dishonestly, many even in the Church would gloss over this fact. The mythology of Byzantium - not its reality - brings with it the reward that the worldly mind always seeks: the reward of *being somebody important*.

Yet being somebody important - in imagination or in reality - brings with it giant responsibilities, particularly for Orthodox Christians. Firstly, one is obliged to tell the truth, about friends and opponents, about peers and those who are smaller or “less important”. Secondly, one is called upon to deal with diplomatic relations based on integrity, and not on gaining opportunities to enhance personal reputation or power.

It would serve well the peace of the Church for Her hierarchs and clergy to speak forcefully and honestly about the consequences of such a false union, and its destructive implications for the harmony and unity of brotherly love among Orthodox Christians in North America.

However much attention the media gives to the wooing of the Patriarch by the Roman Catholics, the outcome of the affair has far more limited implications than either of the participating sides would like to believe. Those who support their increasingly close relationship need to start being honest about this. Should this friendship turn into a marriage (i.e. should the Patriarch sign a union with Rome), most Orthodox Christians in the world would

not be obligated to follow suit, and in fact, many (if not most) would deal with such a union as it should be handled: as a schism from the Church, in which those bishops, clergy, and laity who join in, depart from the Church, Her holy orders, and Her Communion.

Those in North America who seek such a union must be honest with themselves and with others, that the results of their efforts could well be the further isolation of the Patriarchate, rather than the enhancement of its prestige and position. The results would certainly produce a greater disunity among Orthodox Christians - quite possible a Schism - rather than the "unity of love" for which these advocates hope.

Christian love means telling the truth. Just as it behooves all Orthodox to be clear that the Patriarch is not the "spiritual leader of Orthodox Christians" (i.e. an Orthodox "Pope"), it would also serve well the peace of the Church in North America for Her hierarchs and clergy to speak forcefully and honestly to the faithful about the consequences of such a false union, its historic and catastrophic implications for the Church, and its destructive implications for the harmony and unity of brotherly love among Orthodox Christians in North America. Any other message is simply less than honest.



Green Martyrdom

"Professing to be wise, they became fools...exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creation, rather than the Creator," (Romans 1:24-25)

Green politics is on the move. For years, environmentalist parties in Europe have seen electoral success, largely because of a voting system which favours smaller parties. Yet now in western parliamentary systems like the United Kingdom and Canada, the Green Party is breaking ground, and seems to be on the cusp of winning parliamentary seats. Even if it should fail to do so in the short term, its impact on the political debate has been overwhelming, effectively replacing religious voices as the moral force in public debate.

It is not difficult to see the reasons green politics have become popular. It rejects the evils of capitalistic materialism, and its destructive side effects on the physical world, so painfully evident both on the environmental front, and in the cost to human dignity in the workforce, in family life, in health, and in advertising. Like the spiritual malaise which has rejected the failed spiritual constructs of the last few centuries, the political rejection of establishment solutions to political problems is a shocking development. In the ongoing political revolution, however, the rise of green politics should not be unexpected.

Like every political movement, green politics is based on a spiritual idea. Capitalism finds its centre in materialistic monetary power, liberalism in a vague idea of the "spirit of man", and socialism in the idea of social progress through revolution: all these are fundamentally atheistic, rejecting anything beyond the material world, although their supporters will sometimes attempt to dovetail their ideologies with certain religious teachings.

Green politics is different, however. Rather than reject a spiritual worldview, green politics is based squarely on *pantheism*, the idea that God (or at least divinity) is in everything. This pantheism does not distinguish between the Creator and the creation, or the Divine

Essence and the Divine Energies, as Saint Gregory Palamas and other Holy Fathers teach. Thus, the fate of the created world is somehow spiritualized, and the state of the material world is taken as normative.

Like every political movement, green politics is based on a spiritual idea. Green politics is different, however. Rather than reject a spiritual worldview, green politics is based squarely on pantheism.

This is the pseudo-spiritual worldview the fathers condemned when they found it in early heresies. Green politics simply takes this same worldview, and makes it modern and political. Generally speaking, the leadership of secular green politics views the world as an interconnected organism, with a unity of soul and spirit. Even inanimate living objects are seen to share in this "spirit"; animals are necessarily included as well. While it laudably advocates the protection of the created world, particularly animals, its solutions are not based on the Christian idea of stewardship of creation, but rather on the humanistic construction of the "rights" of animals. (Two centuries of the "rights revolution" since 1789 has shown that such rights are rather flimsy, and depend very much on the agreeability of the powers that be.)

Orthodox Christianity has since the earliest times had its own "green movement", that is, monasticism (and by extension, asceticism in general). It is through this vocation that Orthodox Christians endeavour to work out their salvation, and to find the original Likeness of Christ lost in the Fall. The Church refers to this as "green martyrdom":

"There are three kinds of martyrdom...white martyrdom, green martyrdom, and red martyrdom. White martyrdom consists in a man's abandoning everything he loves for God's sake ... Green martyrdom consists in this, that by means of fasting and labour he frees himself from his evil desires, or suffers toil in penance and repentance. Red martyrdom consists in the endurance of a Cross or death for Christ's sake" (Celtic text, 7th century).

Icons of the monastic saints often depict them in green, as do icons of Saint John the Baptist. Green is the traditional colour for the feastdays of monastic saints and prophets, and is also the colour used in the East to represent the Holy Spirit, acquired through ascetical life, whether by monastics or by faithful Orthodox Christians living out the true ascetical Christian calling. Like the advocates of green politics, such ascetics seek to transform the world. Unlike green politics, however, this transformation is focused entirely on self-transformation, with societal transformation as a possible byproduct, but only after the struggling Christian individual acquires some degree of holiness. For Christians, it is always the holiness that transforms the world, redeeming Creation, and re-acquiring the lost Image. The efforts of the fallen mind, and the fallen constructs of human government, are at best a mere shadow of the Truth, and at worst, a dark ideology which has separated itself from Christ. The tree is not then the Tree of the Cross, but the tree of Death, the tree of Eden,

by which mankind trusted himself, and by himself, lost himself.

The nature of this tree is evident in its fruits. Green politics advocates the loosening of drug laws, even at a time when intoxicants and addictions already paralyze millions of lives. A carnal approach to questions of physical purity is not merely a consequence of the ideology (as it is in capitalism and socialism), but is a central belief: prostitution should be legalized and made “safe”; homosexual liaisons should be given the legitimacy of law, and those who would speak out to preserve a patristic understanding of the human person should be silenced by the weight of the same law.

The world is holy; it is not God.

In contrast, the green martyrdom of the monastic and ascetical life deals with such attachments at their core, in the spiritual heart. Affirming nature, while grieving its fall in the universal sense as well as in the personal, the ascetical Christian weeps for his or her sins, gathering the senses into the spiritual heart through prayer, so as to be freed from carnality. The world is *holy*; it is not *God*. For the Christian ascetic, the redemption of the world and society can never be achieved through a social movement, much less through individual activism. This is the foundation of western liberation theology: that God’s Kingdom comes through outward struggle and activism. Yet the Christian ascetic - the true green martyr - knows that the Lord said, “The Kingdom of God is within you,” (Luke 17:21), and thus fights on the battlefield of the spiritual heart, since it is only on this battlefield that victory can be won in the only war that counts: the unseen, spiritual warfare.

As the false gods of the old world crumble, based as they were on human rationalism, a new spirituality is taking form. It is a wholistic, pseudo-spirituality, which does not distinguish between the Creator and the Creation, which calls for personal struggle only within the context of a wider ideology. The green movement is the political expression of the spirituality of ecumenism, and will doubtlessly grow. For Orthodox Christians, however, the choice is forever between a passing ideology built on heresy, or the timeless asceticism of Christ and the saints. God knows that green martyrdom has brought the Church safely through darker days than this.

From the Trenches: Rome and Same Sex Unions

“Put not your hope in princes, in sons of men, in whom there is no salvation” - Psalm 145 (6): 3

So our leaders in the Canadian Parliament voted not to revisit the definition of marriage in Canadian law, leaving the definition almost entirely a matter of personal definition. The Prime Minister, who has done his best to restore the traditional definition of marriage to Canadian law, was unable to muster even all the votes of his own caucus on the issue. Politically speaking, the question is now closed.

It was ironic to observe the change that has come over our country on moral issues over the last decade. Quebec MPs, who represent a province that is (or at least, was) mostly Roman Catholic, voted almost unanimously to keep the traditional definition of marriage out of Canadian law. This includes the new opposition leader, a Roman Catholic who sees the question not as one of eternal truth, but as a question of civil rights. One new separatist MP, a Roman Catholic priest and advocate on homosexual issues, had the honesty to say that although he believed the Vatican was wrong on the question, as an MP who is also a cleric, he would stay away from such votes - that is, until he is able to set *the Vatican* straight, as it were.

Bowed by the defeat of the government motion supporting traditional marriage, the Prime Minister announced he would not be introducing legislation to protect clergy who choose not to perform such unions, preferring to leave the question up to the courts. In short, he knew such a law would not pass. At the same time, some Ontarians threatened legal action against Roman Catholic authorities for denying two Roman Catholic homosexuals the right to communion. The courts will settle this, too, no doubt, ensuring their Constitutional right to do as they please, along with the rights of atheists to receive Communion, pet owners to baptize their squirrels, and polygamists to get a group rate on weddings. Yes, it’s all funny now, but so was the concept of same sex “marriage” in Canada five years ago.

For many Orthodox Canadians, the issue has hardly registered on their radar. Many in the Church will continue to march out to the ballot box and vote for Members of Parliament who believe the parish priest should go to jail when he refuses to solemnize the union of Adam and Steve. Of course, like any religious group, there are true believers and “adherents”; the Lord Himself had such in His circle, and still does today. Such non-adhering “adherents” should repent of their apostasy, of course, but most won’t feel the need to do so, since they only come for Pascha, weddings, and funerals, or more often, not at all.

Like the Roman Catholics, the real test on the marriage question will be whether Orthodox priests will have the courage to give up serving as government agents for legally recognized marriages, and choose to simply serve as *priests*. The First Ecumenical Council forbade holding any state office, yet most clergy do just that as agents for registering marriages. The consequences of such a decision would likely be a sharp decline in marriages in the Church; short of a means of pleasing grandma, Church marriages for those who are merely “adherents” would be a giant inconvenience. The secular wedding chapel business will grow; Church membership rosters will shrink, but only to include those who already participate in a meaningful way. Like Roman Catholics in the province of Quebec, many who are Orthodox in name only would choose to go their own way. The rest would have to count the cost - financial, personal, and family - of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian.

Now that the largest religious group in the country has revealed its own gaping gap between belief and practice, everything is up to the courts, and such a decision for Orthodox clergy and faithful alike cannot be very far away.

Happy 2007. 