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The Vikings in Newfoundland

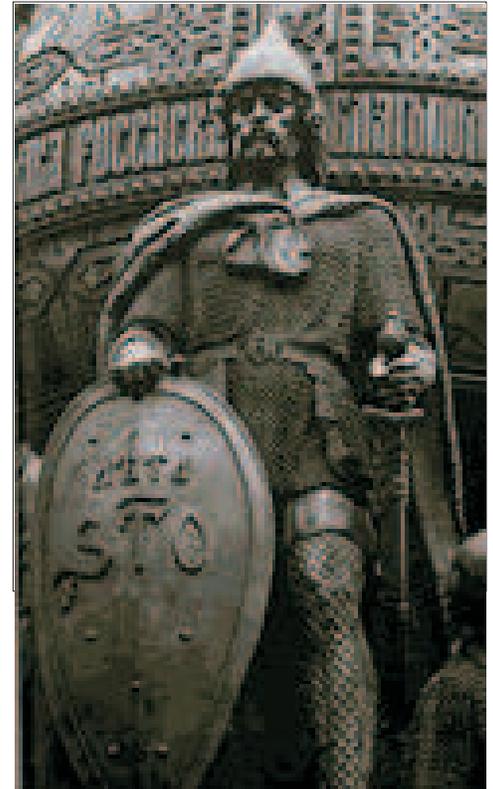
Canada's first Orthodox parish?

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." - Matthew 18:20

The tiny community of L'Anse aux Meadows at the far northern tip of Newfoundland is distinguished among Canadian heritage sites as the oldest European settlement in Canada. Scarcely a dozen buildings remain of this Viking settlement, constructed over one thousand years ago by a group of Scandinavian settlers who appeared ready to make a new home in the frigid northlands of what would later become Canada.

It is almost certain that the tiny group was led by a Viking named Karlsefni, an associate of Leif Erikson (called Leif the Lucky, for his many extraordinary successes), one of the first Norsemen to accept baptism within a largely pagan culture. By the time these settlers arrived in Canada, Christianity and paganism were living side by side in northern Europe, and had not yet had the opportunity to discover the differences which would inevitably lead to conflict. The Norse were a pragmatic lot, whose religious zeal was usually focused on doing whatever it took to survive and to win. And the Christian God was the ultimate Victor.

A delightful story is told of the curious Viking habit of seeking repeat baptisms; it seems the Norsemen were drawn to baptism, every year, at the hands of Saint Ansgar and others, enjoying the fresh white shirt and ten silver talents they customarily received at the hands of the priest, if only they would allow themselves to be



submerged beneath the sacred waters (Joseph Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship*, p. 73). For the average pragmatic Viking, multiple baptisms simply made sense: it conferred spiritual as well as material benefits desperately needed in a seagoing culture, where life was hard, brutish, and short.

It is understandable that Orthodox clergy in the Norse lands immediately curtailed the Viking zeal for multiple baptisms, just as soon as it came to their attention. (The throngs of Norsemen must have been a bit of a blur to the average missionary priest. One can only imagine the encounters and conversations between the eager Vikings and the bewildered clerics). But just as with mission work today, only God can plumb the depths of the heart of a Christian man, and perhaps the Vikings did have their fair share of zealous converts, offering silver crosses as illustrations to the Odin

worshippers of the God Who destroyed Death Itself. For a Norseman, just as for us today, one cannot do better than that.

We know that the Norse seafaring parties who traveled to North America contained mixed crews of Thor-worshippers and Christians (Erikson himself started out as the former, and ended up, rather early in life, as the latter). We also know that one of the parties of settlers his adventures produced the first Canadian-born child of European extraction, a boy named Snorri, whose grandchildren included three bishops right around the time of the Great Schism (news of which traveled very slowly to Viking lands, in any case).

Perhaps here we have a glimpse of the first Christian community in Canada: a tiny one, to be sure, and not organized as far as the Church is concerned. Their firstborn child was almost certainly baptized, although probably back in the old country, once his parents joined their companions and fled from the North American natives who never seemed to take a liking to the Norse tendency to attack on sight. Outnumbered, far from home, and cold (yes, even Vikings get cold), it was perhaps inevitable that the first Orthodox settlement in Canada was not to last. It would seem the unfortunate trend of Orthodox Canadians looking back to the old country and not putting down roots in the west was established early on.

The rubble at L'ance aux Meadows in northern Newfoundland reminds us that a minute Orthodox presence likely existed in Canada long before two world wars. Our Viking brother Leif the Lucky and his kinsmen, were what one might think of as founding members of the first Orthodox community in Canada - whether they knew it, or not.

It is almost certain that no Orthodox priest was present at the first settlement at L'ance aux Meadows. Yet archaeological digs further northwest on Baffin Island present an interesting possibility. A thirteenth-century Thule native site produced an intriguing relic: a tiny carved figure dressed in European clothing, with evidence of a cape over the shoulders, and a long cloth draped around the neck, hanging down to the feet - and marked with a cross. Robert McGhee, who specializes in Arctic archaeology at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, suggests



Figure at left: Thule culture carving recovered from a thirteenth-century site on southern Baffin Island, apparently showing a person in European clothing. Height of carving 5.4 cm. Taken from the article, *Contact between Native North Americans and the Medieval Norse: A Review of the Evidence*; Robert McGhee, *American Antiquity*, Vol. 49, No. 1. (Jan., 1984), pp. 4-26.

this figure shows a crusader who served as a retainer for a viking captain. This is based on the theory that Christian clergy in northern Europe did not wear pectoral crosses until a much later period.

Yet we know both Saints Cuthbert and Adamnan, saints of the Orthodox west, both wore such crosses, as we can see today on display at the cathedral in Durham, in the north of England. It seems more difficult to believe that a crusader would have traveled thousands of miles with pagan Vikings, rather than a Christian priestmonk, seeking out mission territory, or more likely, seeking a remote monastic home, as we know the Celts did in Greenland centuries before. Whether this figure represented an Orthodox priest or a cleric of the western Latins after the Schism, we'll likely never know.

But for Orthodox Christians in Canada, the rubble at L'ance aux Meadow and the carving from Baffin Island remind us that a minute Orthodox presence likely existed in Canada long before two world wars, and long before the Reformation. These facts confirm that the first Christians to set foot on our soil were from what is sometimes erroneously called the "undivided Church" - the Orthodox Church before the breaking away of Rome. And our brother Leif the Lucky, along with his kinsmen at L'ance aux Meadow - and perhaps even a lone priestmonk on Baffin island, were what one might think of as founding members of the first Orthodox community in Canada - whether they knew it, or not. 

A Canadian Orthodox Commonwealth?

The Nation that Could Have Been

Like most Canadian immigrants, the first European settlers in the area of Canada - Celtic monks and Vikings - were looking for a new place to call home, at a time when home had run out of room for them. Unlike the encounters of Orthodox monastics

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with natives in Alaska, the Celtic and Viking immigration, such as it was, came to a bleak end in missionary terms: the Vikings were driven out by hostile natives who perceived (perhaps correctly) the Vikings to be invaders, and the Celtic monks left the area surrounding Greenland because the native population would not accommodate the life the Celts were seeking; i.e. absolute quiet and seclusion.

But what if things had been different? One can imagine a pastorally oriented Celtic version of Saint Herman of Alaska or Saint Innocent, traveling over the tundra, making friends with various native groups, tending their illnesses and entertaining their children, while at the same time sharing the Gospel in a very personal way. Undoubtedly, such holy individuals would also have been the conduit of the Lord's grace, both in serving the Holy Mysteries of Baptism and Communion, as well as blessing the native peoples with a share of lifesaving miracles.

Imagine a kind of early Church Iroquois or Church Algonquin, using Celtic letters, much as Tlingit and Aleut church texts use Cyrillic even today.

One can envision an early ecclesiastical native language, a kind of Imagine an early Church Iroquois or Church Algonquin, using Celtic letters, much as Tlingit and Aleut church texts use Cyrillic even today. The distinct sound of native chant would undoubtedly have drifted through wooden churches built on local architectural models. Annual blessings would have taken place at the beginning of hunting season, and prayers would have undoubtedly been offered at the appointment of native community leaders - all of this assuming the Celtic monks actually cared to share the Faith, and not to waste time trying to turn Mohawk into Celts.

Such a decentralized setting, with a mix of Celtic and native bishops given autonomy from their mother church across the ocean, would have provided an interesting backdrop for the arrival of the Norsemen a few centuries later. Rather than facing an alien people, native Christians would have encountered an increasingly Christian Viking immigration seeking a new homeland in the west. The then centuries-old native Orthodox population would undoubtedly have seen the obligation upon them to assist their Viking brethren in rescuing their kinsmen from the errors of Thor-worship. Perhaps local native Orthodox chieftains, like St. Ethelbert of Kent or St. Vladimir of Kiev, would have offered these brethren a small territory in which to make their home, and the two Christian cultures (really three, if one considers the Celtic inheritance) would have settled down as neighbours.

But wouldn't the whole thing have fallen apart, into inevitable war between peoples? The inheritance of Byzantium and Russia suggests it would not have done so, since in these cases, the shared identity came not from race or blood (a later idea arising out of post-Enlightenment ethnic nationalism), but from the idea of Orthodox Christianity as citizenship. It was this same notion that allowed Orthodox Russians, whether Slavic, Scandinavian,

Asiatic, or Alaskan native, to live together as one Orthodox people. It was this same notion that allowed the multi-ethnic Byzantines to welcome a quarter million Orthodox brethren fleeing the Norman invasion of England in 1066, and to construct three English churches in Constantinople itself (a demographic which would suggest twenty percent of the blood in the veins of residents of the Great City and their descendants is actually Anglo-Saxon). Could not such a harmony have prevailed in North America?

It is reasonable to argue that not only could such a civilization have come into being, but in fact, that it *would have* come into being. Erik Wahlgren, author of *The Vikings and America*, points out that one major import of the Vikings was the draft horse, rather than the warhorse of later European emigres. Such animals are useless for major warfare, but extremely useful for expanding agricultural civilizations, which native Canadians were at the time of the Viking arrival. Had they forged a civilization united by their shared Orthodox Christian heritage, a multi-lingual federation of chieftains whose people worked the soil with great success would have been a likely result.

In Byzantium and Orthodox Russia, shared identity came not from race or blood (a later idea arising out of post-Enlightenment ethnic nationalism), but from the idea of Orthodox Christianity as citizenship.

The results for other immigrants to North America would have been remarkable. Rather than French Catholics and British Protestants arriving in a land they could easily exploit, with cultures they could destroy in the name of Christianity, these arrivals would have been faced with a vastly different picture: A Christian civilization in which the French and English were the minorities, in which Orthodox Christianity was the majority faith, and in which Orthodox Greek and Slavic immigrants would have found a place among the cultural elite. The English and French might have even been stuck doing domestic work for the mixed-blood Native-Norse population. Perhaps the Scots would have returned to their roots, getting jobs at universities learning about and teaching the ancient liturgical language of their Celtic ancestors.

Alas, it was not to be. Yet even in this exercise of historical fiction, there is a fundamental lesson about Orthodox identity and mission work, and its approach to converting a people to Christ, instead of trying to wipe out a culture. And perhaps more importantly, the lesson learned by the Byzantines, and passed on to the Russians - the idea of a citizenship based on the Orthodox Faith, rather than race or culture - perhaps this is the lesson that Orthodox Canadians can learn and apply in our own time.

Celts and Vikings missed the chance to do this a millennium ago, and we are spiritually poorer for their mistake. 🍁

False Black: Gothic & Orthodox?

The demise of comfy middle class Orthodox Christianity is evident all around us. As spiritual life tries to accommodate modern secular life, the signs of spiritual erosion abound: personal prayer fades, the living transfer of Orthodox life from one generation to the next breaks down, weekly (especially weekday) attendance fades, and nametag-style Orthodoxy becomes the reality. Orthodox communities, which often appear strong on the outside, are collapsing from within.

In sharp contrast, where we find Orthodox life lived authentically in North America, the opposite is happening. Children of the lost generations, now in their twenties and thirties, are coming to the Church (one cannot say "returning to the Church", since most have never been there from the start). The struggle to lead an ascetical Christian life is real, albeit imperfect. Young people, sick of the falseness of modern advertising, modern politicians, and modern religions, are drawn to the spiritual magnet of authentic Christianity. This movement, which saw its first light in the 1960s and 70s among punks-turned-monks on the American West Coast, has not been limited to North America. Lost generations in former Communist countries, particularly Russia and Serbia, are also setting aside the empty promises of secularism, and travelling on their knees - sometimes literally - to venerate the Cross of Christ.

One of the most vivid examples of this can be seen in the pilgrimage made by hundreds of thousands of children of the secular age to the relics of Saint Basil of Ostrog, in Serbia. The saint has appeared to scores of the lost generation of post-Communist youth, insisting they visit his monastery, where he reposed centuries ago. Ironically, many of the pilgrims were not simply young Orthodox who had lapsed from their faith; most have been victims of the godless materialism of their age, enslaved to the alcohol, drugs, and sex that their post-Christian regimes offered as a temporary escape from inevitable oblivion. Seeing this catastrophic loss of a generation, Saint Basil appears to have taken their salvation as his own labour.

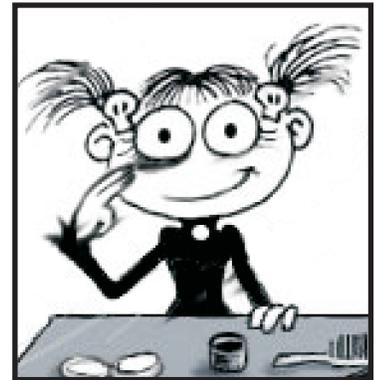
The struggles of Canadian young people seem mild by comparison to the refugees of atheistic Communism, and many would suggest, a much simpler missionary field. Comparatively few Canadian youth have known real hunger and want, and have enjoyed arguably the best state-run social services and healthcare (not to mention generously endowed public education) for most of their lives. Ironically, it is this very lack of suffering, this lack of struggle, which has made North America perhaps the most difficult Orthodox mission field, apart from Western Europe.

The ascetical Christian spirit that calls each person to self-sacrifice, to defeating the slavery to the passions of acquisitiveness, lust, gluttony, and sloth - these are not appealing items on the Christmas lists of many Canadian youth. Reared on a diet of multi-channel options, carefully filled social calendars, and schools that often affirm the very passions the Christian faith seeks to uproot, a majority of Canadian youth are not simply disinterested in Orthodox Christianity: they are, in fact, unable to make their way to it, even if they wanted to do so.

Consider the young people who yearn for a fulfilling relationship with a member of the opposite sex. They are bombarded with sexual imagery in all media, surrounded with the titillating babble

of their text-messaging peer group, and bereft of the tools for spiritual struggle (which Orthodox clergy are called to teach them, but either have not done, or could not do because families were too busy with the family business to attend to the spiritual formation of their kids). Even faithful Orthodox Christian young people who have been given the spiritual tools and preserved from much of the muck that passes for popular culture - even these faithful ones struggle mightily. For those without the preparation of struggle and suffering, immersed in sensuality, the struggle is lost before it is begun.

To be sure, a segment of the population under thirty has seen its share of pain, and has experienced genuine suffering and loss. In a suburban setting, this can often only manifest itself in a shadow of the image of real Christian struggle. Punk and goth movements and their parallels over the last forty years (beatniks, batcavers, alternative and industrial music



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movements) have provided an avenue to authentically offer up the spiritual conditions of their generation. Their forms are practically Orthodox: black clothes, unflattering footwear, silver crucifixes and imagery that confronts the question of death in head-on fashion. Similarly, their lyrics, poetry, and literature, ranging from the anger of the English punk scene of the 1970s through to the gothic Edgar Allan Poe fans of our day, provide a window on hearts which are suffering, and sometimes very broken.

So what is holding back such a group from mass migration to the Orthodox faith? The questions these movements raise are the authentic questions of the human condition: Why is there suffering? Why is there evil? How do I come to terms with death - my own, and the death of those I love? And how do I achieve happiness and release from this fallen world, both now and in eternity? These are the questions of the Orthodox faith, and those who truly ask them are rightly cynical about the perky, comfortable answers offered by saccharine western-style Christianity. So again, why are they slow to come?

Perhaps the answer lies within the same artificial suburbs these young people (and not so young, too) hope to escape. As Kirievsky, a 20th century Russian Orthodox philosopher, once said, a man *is* his faith. And what faith might that be in the comfortable suburbs? It is a faith that fundamentally trusts in material means for its own salvation. Consumerism, with its ever-pressing drive to work, forms the essential structure for our weeks, days, and months. It offers a multitude of options to the individual - rebellious fashion, conformist fashion, recreational fashion - but always remains drowning in the quest for things that pass away, and cannot possibly satisfy the human heart. And for the individual who tires of all this, ever-present entertainment provides a panacea to take away all pain, or at least all consciousness, for a moment.

The goth girl or punk boy who struggles to find the answers to the yearning of their own hearts must overcome the greatest barrier of our times: the barrier of fashion, to which we are all enslaved from

our fallen nature. The path out of such enslavement - whether among the ancient martyrs, the refugees of Communism, or in suburban Canada - can never be through passing fashion itself.

The punks, the goths, and all the "alternative" movements have been granted the softness of heart to see the real and burning questions of the human condition. To find the answers, and to live them, requires a rejection of that fashion which the vast majority are unwilling, or even unable, to give, but for the grace of God, and by the prayers of the faithful. As comfortable middle-class Orthodox parishes collapse under the weight of their own spiritual emptiness, perhaps this is the place they can find their resurrection: not in better youth events or Bible studies, and certainly not in cheery pig roasts and dance recitals, but rather in purposefully serving prayers and akathists to saints like Saints Basil of Ostrog, John Maximovich, and the martyrs of the Communist Yoke. Spiritually useful parishes would offer teaching and the sale (or gift) of written lives of the desert saints, who struggled successfully with the same sins. This is a beginning, but it is an important step in connecting those who ask the essential questions of human existence (the punks, goths, and alternative scenes), to those who provide the authentic, tested answers (the saints of the Church).

In light of the struggle of the lost generations to wear their mourning colours for their own sins, and not as slaves of yet another fashion, we might even ask the prayers of saints who came to know the incompleteness of their own spiritual struggles only late in the game, like Saint Niketas, the Goth*. For it is only by the prayers of these holy ones that they - and we - shall find our way out of the vacuum of fashion.



**Saint Niketas the Goth was converted from paganism to Arianism in the fourth century, and served in good faith as an Arian priest. The Arian Goths considered him a saint, for his holiness of life, and he died an Arian. When the Goths were later converted to Orthodox Christianity, his name remained on the calendar of feasts. His incorrupt hand can be found at Decani Monastery, in Kosovo, Serbia.*

Death of the DQ: *Nostalgia isn't Faith*

*Orthodoxy is the living faith of the dead,
not the dead faith of the living.* - Jaroslav Pelican

I remember the stifling day in 1977 my mother took me to our favourite ice cream place during baseball season, to savour a sundae in a promotional plastic baseball cap. The cap was in miniature, of course, and inverted, to keep all the frozen cream inside. We were not sure if it was in fact real cream (it never did seem to melt), nor did I care about which team colours held my butterscotch beauty. The only thing that mattered was that I had discovered something like an earthly paradise, to which I yearned to return again and again.

Dairy Queen soon gained a special place in my heart - part of the nostalgia we carry with us from childhood. Our pilgrimages there were seasonal, to be sure, which added to the mystery and the wonder of the place, with freezers full of ice cream cakes constructed through some kind of arcane wisdom unknown to the masses in the simpler times of the 1970s. We would never have the chance during childhood to actually *taste* these cakes: the cost was

prohibitive. Yet the knowledge that they existed, like this wondrous place itself, reassured us that we could always return, year after year, now and unto ages of ages.

Sadly, the Dairy Queen is now gone, closed down to make way for a more lucrative commercial venture. It will never be possible to relive those sweet early days, or to share them with children or grandchildren, in that place which holds such a special place in the heart. And it is not just this location: one by one, these tiny destinations of summertime fun are disappearing, and although the whole thing seems terribly wrong to the nostalgic mind, the fading history of this treasure makes logical sense.

Annual, or biannual, pilgrimages to the place we claim to love are simply not enough to keep something alive. It is very nice to yearn to relive childhood moments, and to share them with our children, but on a deeper level, this nostalgia without concrete expression is empty and meaningless. No one will stand weeping outside the wrecking site of a nostalgic memory, if that memory goes no deeper than nostalgia. The yearly delectation of butterscotch may be a wonderful thing, but it is not enough to bring one back in the middle of February, in the midst of the work week, or in the racing years that together form our lives. It is certainly not enough for which to protest, or for which to die.

Faith that does not shape the decisions of our lives, our spouse, our job, the raising of our children and the ordering of our daily routine - such faith is a false faith, nostalgia at its worst.

In a strange sort of way, this saccharine nostalgia (no pun intended) closely parallels the spiritual life so rampant in our country, and in the West in general. An acquaintance once opined, "I may never attend church, but I'm glad it's there for the important times." The same saccharine nostalgia that passes for the love of the past also masquerades as faith - *but it is not faith*. Faith that does not penetrate the moments of our days, which does not shape the decisions of our lives, our spouse, our job, the raising of our children and the ordering of our daily routine - such faith is a false faith, nostalgia at its worst.

Each Pascha, the Festal Oration of Saint John Chrysostom reminds Orthodox faithful that the joy of the Resurrection is opened to everyone - including those who come at the eleventh hour. This hope encompasses even the death bed repentance, the rare church attender, and the materialist immersed in the fallen world. Christ's Resurrection is such mighty spiritual medicine, that all sin, all brokenness, can be healed and is healed as it is joined to Christ.

But herein lies the key: our healing is found in joining ourselves to Christ, just as a husband is joined to a wife. The bond is effective because it is ongoing. It brings us support throughout our life not because we stop in to check on the kids occasionally, but because we stay up with them, night after night, we argue and forgive, sharing the fullness of life as part of a family.

Those who are left - or rather, those who *choose to leave*

themselves - on the outside looking in on the Orthodox spiritual life, may be dazzled by the annual nostalgic tickle of peering into the freezer of sweet memories, but they cannot really taste the fullness of unknown delights. It is weeping for the celebrity we never knew, the friend or relative we never visited. Crocodile tears are not tears of repentance. The joy of the Resurrection is only as full as the commitment of our hearts throughout the days and years of our lives.

The gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church - ever. Should the time come (again) when the Church must retreat to the catacombs, She will still be alive, as She has been since the foundation of the world. Yet whether She is in public view or in hiding, it will matter little for the faithful, or for the nostalgic. The faithful will draw near to Christ's Body, the Church, because She is our Life; the nostalgic will arrive as annual tourists, grab a sample, and go, ever wondering why the annual pilgrimage does not seem to impact on daily life.

Those who love childhood memories by making them a living part of their lives know what real life is, even if such knowledge is found in the loss of precious places and people. Loss may not be the preferred flavour of reality, but it is still reality. Childhood memories - and the Tradition of the Church - do not turn to dust for those who live them daily, since they are, as Jaroslav Pelican said, the living faith of the dead. This is the reason Orthodoxy transcends the destruction of churches, and grows with the deaths of Her martyrs. If the faith of the martyrs, the prayers of the Church, the life of the Apostles, lives in me each day, as it does in the saints, we will share in Her joy always.

The annual pilgrimage, the exercise of nostalgia without faith, or faith that fails to penetrate daily life, is simply the dead faith of the living - available even in butterscotch. 

Nietzsche's Iconography *The Superhero Generation(s)*

"And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, and the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth."

- 1 Samuel 17:49

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image... Thou shalt not bow down thyself, nor serve them, for I the Lord am a jealous God," - Exodus 20:4-5

A venerable priest I once knew, who suffered under the Communists, once shared his dismay that children in Canada had lost any familiarity with the icons of the saints. "I go to bless their houses," he remarked, "And what do I see? Saint George? No! Saint Catherine? No! Teddy bears! Power Rangers! That is who they worship!"

Father has now gone to his repose, but it is ever clearer how right he was, only today, the icons we hang in the rooms of Canadian kids are far beyond Teddy Bears and Power Rangers. Super Heroes have taken on an increasingly violent - even malevolent - tone. The sexualization of celebrities, including Anime cartoons, has pushed back the boundaries of that which is considered

pornographic to younger and younger age groups - yet these images still cover the walls of bedrooms and the doors of school lockers across the country.

Back in my high school teaching days, I remember passing by the locker of one young gentleman of sorts whose decorative tastes included a naked woman on his locker door. There in front of him, I tore off the image, and tossed it into a nearby trash can. He demanded that I give it back to him - i.e. that I pick out the pornography from amid the banana peels and soda cans and return it to his possession. Instead, I offered to mail it to his mother. The conversation promptly ended.

This little encounter underscored how far we have come in the images we allow our kids not just to watch, perhaps in passing, on television, but to purposely display, each day, every day, in their "private" spaces. Of course, these images (or more accurately, these *false images*, since they depict the images of false gods prohibited by the Second Commandment) reflect the things we admire and worship.

If you asked your children, who is your favourite saint, what would they say? What would YOU say?

It is no coincidence that the perennial childhood superhero in red tights and cape who has graced the walls of generations of young men springs not from the pages of scripture, but from the writings of the prophet of our nihilistic age, Nietzsche's Superman. A Christian conscience must ask, why would we give our children icons which arose out of nihilism? Orthodox heroes are the saints: not for some puritanical reason, but for the very practical reason that they reflect the qualities we hope to cultivate in our children, and in ourselves. The strength of the saints - particularly the strength of the martyrs - is the very thing that allowed them to be merciful, to forgive, to face death without blinking, and to trust wholly in the Living God. These are the heroes we must give our kids.

If you asked your children, who is your favourite saint, what would they say? What would YOU say? It is regrettable that we reduce saints to watercolour pictures, reducing the images of mighty angels to pretty girls with wings, give shelter to saccharine Precious Moments icons, and sentimental Arian images of "baby Jesus" (Orthodox do this too, in the form of watery sentimentalism, or the desire to sing sweet Bible-camp songs in Orthodox Sunday schools, or other practices completely foreign to the heart and mind of the Church. Is it any wonder so many male youth have essentially abandoned this feminized - and false - offering that passes for Orthodoxy?)

This is not the inheritance of the saints. Saint George, a twenty-three year old soldier, was tortured in twelve different ways over many days, refusing to deny Christ. Saints Theodore, Menas, and so many other remind us that most of the saints of the first few centuries were, in fact, soldiers. Women martyrs and confessors like Saints Catherine, Nina of Georgia, and Tamara (called "King Tamara" in Georgian language) - these are strong figures, showing more courage and interior (as well as exterior) strength than any of

the cartoon superheroes. As the old axiom goes, reality is more unbelievable than fiction!

The absence or destruction of real icons, not just the images but the images in the hearts of the faithful, especially children, has created a void, easily filled by false iconography and false heroes. These heroes give young people no enduring strength, no strength of character beyond their own, no access to God's grace and the mighty prayers of the saints. The account of the Slavic monastery built around the miraculous image of the footprint of the Mother of God is a case in point. Years after the monastery was delivered from a Turkish army by the prayers of the Mother of God, one of its monks met a Turkish soldier at a roadside stop. As the two talked together, they were surprised to learn that they had both been present on the remarkable day that a mighty storm rolled in, just as the Turks prepared to besiege the helpless monastery. The Turk asked the monk "So, do you still worship your goddess?". The monk replied that as Christians, they worshipped God the Holy Trinity, not a goddess. "Yes," the Turk replied, "You worship a goddess. We all saw her that day on the battlefield, wearing a blue robe and red cloak, with stars around her, as she threw down lightning at us. She is the reason we fled. She is the reason you are sitting here today." The monk recognized this description: it was obviously the Mother of God.

Strength is not inherently evil: it is simply a tool, which can be used for great good, but only when it is measured within the Mind of Christ.

We worry about violence on the playground, not because violence is evil, but because it is directed in any direction the perpetrator chooses - the "will to power", as Nietzsche called it. This marks a sharp contrast with the likes of King Arthur (an Orthodox Christian, albeit a marginal one), who adopted the motto, "might for right" over "might makes right". He understood that strength, especially male strength, was not inherently evil: it is simply a tool, which can be used for great good, but only when it is measured within the Mind of Christ.

The saints are the authentic role models for boys, who inherently yearn for a constructive way to use their natural instincts for good: to fight for and to protect those who are weak. These are the posters which should grace their walls, the adventure tales which should enrapture their curiosity and yearning for a battle against evil. Fantasy adventure writers often capture this spirit; what is usually missing is the defined image of the Christian as a true hero - a model every boy and girl needs.

Instead of consigning young men to a fantasy world where violence can be toyed with in "safe" isolation (such as video and role playing games) while breeding violent monsters planning monstrous crimes, Orthodox Christians must invest efforts to build them into the true image of men: the icons of the saints whose images must supplant the posters of Superman, on their walls and in their hearts.



The Shape of the Church Calendar in Canada

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let each man be fully persuaded in his own mind"

-Romans 14:5

In almost every Orthodox nation, the second Sunday after Pentecost is dedicated to all the saints of the nation in which the faithful dwell: in Bulgaria, All Saints of Bulgaria are commemorated; in Greece it is All Saints of Greece; in Serbia and Russia, the saints of Serbia and Russia respectively.

For centuries, North America has been blessed with saints of its own, both those who were born here (like Saint Jacob Nesvetov), and the many saints who spent most of their lives in mission work here (such as Saints Innocent and Herman, to name just two). In Alaska, the land of greatest Orthodox labours, the fruits of the mission work of these saints is overwhelming: entire cultures consider themselves Orthodox, and even secularized natives keep Orthodox holy days as inherited holidays. The saints are beloved, because their mission work impacted not just the minds of the local people, but their hearts as well. Saint John Maximovitch watched over immigrant Russian and Chinese orphans; Saint Herman defended local Aleuts against commercial exploitation by Russian merchants. The measure of their holiness was found not in their loyalty to their party, but in their love for sharing - and living - the Gospel of Christ.

Historically, most Orthodox immigrants have not come to the West as missionaries. Many have come fleeing some form of oppressive yoke, such as Communism or Islam, while others come seeking a higher standard of living for themselves and their children. Yet in most cases, Orthodox immigrants have come to *stay* in Canada, not to return to the "old country", but rather to build a life on North American soil: they open Canadian bank accounts, hold Canadian passports, trade on the Canadian stock market, vote in Canadian elections, and for all secular purposes, aspire to live as Canadians - because they *are* Canadians.

Yet as far as Orthodox Christian life is concerned, many Orthodox in Canada live a hermetically sealed existence, endeavouring to emulate a distant national ghetto, and neglecting the great need to work for (or even actively working against) putting down Orthodox roots in North America. In many cases, within two generations, their kids are lost from the Faith - the paid-off mortgage on the cultural centre (which now sits empty and unused) must somehow provide consolation to the grandparents.

Nowhere is this disconnect between faith and life more evident than in the Church calendar. Not only do most Orthodox parishes in North America never celebrate the feast of the North American saints on the second Sunday after Pentecost - most don't even know it exists. The feast of the Synaxis (or Assembly) of the Martyrs of North America (December 12/25 - civil Christmas for those on the Old Calendar), celebrated along with the feast day of the first revealed North American saint, Herman of Alaska, is almost universally eclipsed by the celebration of Saint Spyridon on the same day.

It is a strange twist of fate that those who came to North America

to enjoy its freedoms, have often forgotten to enjoy the full freedoms they are afforded, in spiritual terms. The same blood of the martyrs that has sanctified foreign lands has also sanctified the land in which we live - albeit in far fewer numbers, but often in more recent years. It is this blood, which would be the seeds of the growth of the Church in Canada, if the Orthodox faithful respond to the call of Saint John Maximovitch to reverence the saints of their own land, the land whose passport, currency, citizenship, and freedoms are good enough to make them call it home.

Although the number of Orthodox Christians continues to demonstrate a rapid decline between generations, the hope for renewal in Orthodox life may only be as far as the Church calendar. The saints of this land have a unique connection to this land, and a unique concern for it: they have walked its shores, worked in its shops, baptized its children, defended its poor, and called it their home - or better still, their sanctuary when their home had been destroyed.

Not only do most Orthodox parishes in North America never celebrate the feast of the North American saints on the third Sunday after Pentecost - most don't even know it exists.

It is in the commemoration of the saints of this land that the Church in North America will find its rebirth, that the Canadian faithful will look forward to the feasts of Saint Herman as the patron of children, celebrating his missionary zeal with the salty pretzels he shared with his Aleut charges. It is here that Canadian scientists and inventors will ask the intercessions of the great inventor-missionary Saint Innocent (Feast Day March 31 / April 12), and will name their technological academies after his memory. It is here that the adventurer and outdoor recreationalists will find reason to gather at the foot of the great Canadian mountains, or on the shores of the mighty northwestern rivers to ask the prayers of St. Brendan, patron of adventurers, for their safety, and will sing to the Lord the services of Holy Church on the highest mountains of our land. It is here that the farmers of the prairies will find aid in the intercessions of Saint Arseny of Winnipeg (Feast Day October 4/17), who spent years crisscrossing the miles of wheat fields and cattle farms, blessing crops and animals against impending epidemics not dissimilar to those of our own day.

It is here that faithful Canadian academics will find solace in the prayers of Saint John Maximovitch (Feast Day June 19 / July 2), who blessed the work of the first Orthodox bookstores and publishing house on the continent, dedicated to spreading the Orthodox faith to all nations. It is here that our first peoples will find an intercessor in Saint Herman, and young native Canadians struggling with temptations, doubt, or fear will find champions before the throne of the Most High in the prayers of Saint Peter the Aleut and Jacob Netsvetov (Feast Days September 24 / October 7 and July 26 / August 8, respectively; Saint Peter is also commemorated with the martyrs of North America on December 12/25). And it is here that Canadian leaders, politicians and community activists, will find strength through the prayers of

Saints Tikhon (Belavin) and Nicolai (Velimirovich) (Feast days April 7/20 and March 5/18, respectively), who stood before civil authorities as ambassadors of their Orthodox faithful, sacrificing their own safety and security for the good of their whole civic culture, not simply their niche in the mosaic.

Just as Greeks remember the deliverance of their land from the Turks on the feast of the Annunciation, so too Canadian Orthodox would remember on November 11th the souls of those who sacrificed

their lives to secure the nation where we can safely practice the Orthodox faith. As secular Canadians mark civil Thanksgiving, let us mark it with services of prayer for our nation and its leaders, giving thanks to God for its many blessings. And on the Sunday nearest Canada Day, let us sing the service of prayer for a civil holiday, that our safety and sovereignty may be preserved, not by our politicians, but by Christ.

In the native land that so many peoples call home, let us pray that the feast of Saint John Maximovitch would become a feast day of the universal witness of Orthodoxy, East and West. Let us ask God that Saint Jacob Netsvetov's feast will be held up as a day to ask the Lord for the reconciliation of divided races and peoples. Let us ask the prayers of Righteous Matushka Olga of Alaska on the day of her repose (Feast day November 8) for all those who work in our hospitals and nursing homes. Let us call upon our father among the saints Alexander (Hotovitsky) who edited the first Orthodox journal in our land, that the Lord may send His

Holy Spirit into the hearts of our journalists and advertising executives, to turn their talents for His glory, and to preserve them from all evil. Let faithful converts find a special intercessor in Saint Alexis Toth and Righteous Father Seraphim Rose, marking the dates of their repose (May 7/20 and August 20 / September 2, respectively) with special services for humility of heart and zeal for the Truth. And may the annual date marking the repose of Saint Raphael (Hawaweeny - Feast day February 27 / March 12) be celebrated with prayers for all immigrants to this land, for whom the saint laboured tirelessly, out of love for His Master Christ.

For only when the time comes that the calendar of saints observed in each and every Orthodox parish in our land bears the names and feast day celebrations of our native saints can Orthodox Christians truly say they are Orthodox Canadians - and not simply visitors in a foreign land. 🍁

