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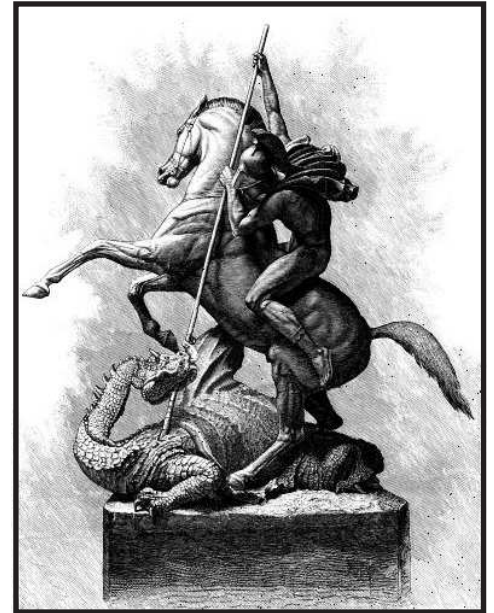
Awake My Soul!

Canada's Patron: *The Dragon-Slayer of Lydda*

*"I saw an angel come down from heaven...
And he laid hold of the dragon, that old
serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and
bound him...and cast him into the
bottomless pit." - Revelation 20:1-3*

Unlike our neighbours to the south, most early settlers to Canada brought with them a love for the saints. Even the most strident anti-Papist protestant often held up the saints of the Church as heroes and protectors, whose memory should be honoured. For the pious, this honour often meant the appointment of patron saints for organizations, and for the nation herself.

It should be no surprise that the leader among these patrons would be Saint George, the dragonslayer and martyr of Lydda, of the fourth century. Saint George exemplifies not only the qualities of a true Christian, but the essential qualities of a true citizen: loyalty, courage, and a deep sense of self-sacrifice for the salvation of others. Holy Tradition tells us that Saint George was a loyal soldier in the army of the pagan emperor Diocletian, a loyalty that remained firm until it was forced to choose between the empire of Rome and the Eternal Kingdom of Christ. The saint saw no conflict with Christianity in serving as a good and loyal citizen, protecting the weak against enemies (including a beastly dragon, outlined in the tradition as it is repeated throughout the world), and swearing loyalty to his emperor - even a demonstrated evil and pagan emperor such as Diocletian.



For Saint George, like Orthodox today, civil citizenship does not come into conflict with faith: faith underpins good citizenship in a healthy kingdom. Only when a nation becomes sick, and demands that the faithful worship false gods - military policy, materialism, sensuality, or the leader himself - must the Christian draw the line, and make the choice for Christ, against the nation.

Faith underpins good citizenship in a healthy kingdom. Only when a nation becomes sick, and demands that the faithful worship false gods, must the Christian draw the line, and make the choice for Christ, against the nation.

The cross of Saint George (originally the flag of the holy city of Jerusalem, borrowed

by the English crusaders in their battles against Islam) graces five provincial coats of arms and six provincial flags (as well as the original national flag). Even the flag of the city of Montreal, the earliest Canadian city, bears the red cross of Christian martyrdom linked to this saint. The colours of his martyrdom are preserved in the national flag used today.

The material evidence of our Canadian national symbols, a national tradition that runs alongside the Holy Tradition of the Church, underscores Saint George's unique position as the first patron saint of Canada. Long before the Roman Catholics introduced Righteous Joseph, the foster father of the Lord, as their patron for Canada, the founding fathers, fueled with a sense of an empire of many cultures garnered from the Byzantines and the Slavs through the Anglo-Norman English, chose a patron and a symbol that stands the test of time. For Saint George is not simply the patron of Canada, but the patron of countless Orthodox peoples. He is the patron of the Church in Moscow and the armed forces in Greece. The nation enlightened by his cousin, Saint Nina of Georgia, bears his names as well as his cross on its flag. He is the patron of the Great City, Constantinople, first in honour among the surviving ancient patriarchates. He is patron and defender of Arab Orthodox in Palestine and Lebanon, as well as the Orthodox faithful of a millennium ago in Genoa, Calabria, Catalonia, Venice, Portugal, and Lithuania. Further, he is the patron of the ancient Orthodox empire of Ethiopia, the crown of Christianity in early Africa, and a beacon to Orthodox faithful of African heritage to this day.

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Whether they knew it or not, the builders of Upper and Lower Canada forged a nation around a patron saint whose universality could not have been anticipated, but by God. Even in our age of contrived government-funded multiculturalism, the universal Orthodox witness of Saint George, the Great Martyr, must not be lost, for he represents the true unity of the Orthodox faith, a unity not based on changing national identities and politics, but on the Blood of Christ, shared by him and by Orthodox faithful to this day, and the blood shed by the martyrs of the Church.


Yet how often have Canadian Orthodox Christians been deceived, forgetting this inheritance? How often have we seen our commonalities reduced to sharing the crumbs of government handouts for "culture" - singing, and dancing, eating and drinking - which keep us divided into ethnic ghettos? The Great Martyr himself loved his nation - pagan Rome - but his heart was always tied to a higher nation, a better citizenship, an eternal home in Heaven. It was this citizenship that inspired Saint Alexandra, wife of an emperor, to accept Christ and deny her husband and his empire - and to face martyrdom at his hands. This is the eternal citizenship summed up by the faith of Saint George, a mixed-blood Anatolian Palestinian whose true

Father was the Lord, and whose true mother was the Church.

As we mark the feast day of the Patron Saint of Canada (April 23 / May 6), we must ask ourselves if we have been worthy of him. Have our Orthodox legislators been both loyal citizens, and champions of the Faith, or have they accepted the offers of rank, title, and money from modern-day Diocletians? Have our Orthodox leaders demonstrated the faith of Saint Alexandra who, looking to the martyrdom of Holy George, experienced conversion of heart, whatever the consequence to their public position? And have we, as citizens in the army of a new pagan empire of the west, made up our minds that the blood red cross of Saint George, the red Cross of Christ, is the cross we will carry, in our families, in our schools, at our workplace, and throughout our life?

Unlike Saint George, the dragons we face today are much more subtle, but like the dragons he conquered, they still hide in dark holes, and still offer bribes, if only we turn from Christ, even for a moment. These are the dragons that lurk within our political debate, that bribe us with promotions if we only pour our blood into our ambitions, that offer us wealth and position if we will just set aside the quaint custom of prayer and Church, for the idol of running our family restaurant, being a cultural community leader, and - above all - fitting in to mainstream Canadian life.

The banner of Saint George - the banner of Jerusalem - still graces our national symbols. He is still alive in our nation, but more importantly, he is still alive, standing before Christ, interceding for us and for our country, if we only ask him, marking his feast day with love and conviction.

Our alternative is the alternative of the earthly life, and the dragon who is its symbol and the symbol of its fallen ruler. For not only is Holy George the dragon slayer, he is also the *tiller of the earth*, which is the meaning of his name, and like him, we have the task of tilling the soil of our spiritual hearts and those of our country, that watered by the blood of his martyrdom, they may bring forth fruit in the Kingdom of Christ. 

Warming the Heart: *The Orthodox Spirit in Everyday Life*

"The love of many will grow cold" - Matthew 24:12

As a child in an Anglican household, the spirit of Lenten asceticism was summed up in the hot cross buns we ate on weekends.

Anglicanism at that time still understood the idea that fasting should be more thorough during the weekdays or Great Lent, and somewhat relaxed for the weekend, although the actual observance of fasting during weekdays was often ignored. Hot cross buns were on the shelves from March until the end of April, then like clockwork, they were gone.

The living memory of Christian life, of the nitty gritty business of actually living in pious remembrance of the Lord and His Passion, was still alive in those bygone years, in a way which impacted the supermarkets and breadboxes of the country. (For those not old enough to remember bread boxes, an



and their lives, and the prayers they said at the baking of bread (a lost art today, but we can still slice a cross into each loaf before slicing it). All these little things warm the heart of the Orthodox life.

If we really hope to welcome the saints and their prayers into our homes, it would make sense that we would piously reverence their icons as we depart from our homes, and as we return. The same is true when visiting friends and family, who also bear the Lord's Image, that we should as the apostle bids us, offer peace to the house as we arrive.

If Orthodox parents are not blessing their children with the Sign of the Cross, they can be fairly sure no one else is, either.

Out of love for our children and a care for their future, we would bless their beds with the Sign of the Cross as they go to sleep, praying for them, that the Lord would deliver them from all evil, and bless them with health, and with a faithful future spouse. It makes spiritual sense to start with their crib.

Christian life in the home once found its way even to the dinner table, beyond mealtime prayers. Bread of any sort was always broken, and never cut - because the Lord *broke bread*, and told Peter to lay aside his sword (or knife). Scraps were put out for the birds, where such a practice is possible and safe, giving back to creation that which it gave. Common dishes were set on the table to be shared, since the Lord dipped His hand in the dish with His disciples: Christians didn't have "my share" and "your share" of the food: they simply *shared*.

Each room became a tiny church, with and icon of St. Euphrosinos the Cook watching prayerfully over the kitchen, the Mystical Supper gracing the wall of the dining room, the Marriage at Cana or Saints Joachim and Anna in mom and dad's room, and icons of everyone's patron saint somewhere for easy veneration and prayer - or better still, all together for prayers as a family. By extension, even the computer or television would be blessed by the image and prayers of Christ's saints.

With more and more commuters, and cities clogged with traffic, do we take the time to get our cars blessed? How about even making the Sign of the Cross before we start driving, or as we pass the flower-covered roadside crosses that mark the site of a automobile death.

In India to this day, children still seek the blessing of their parents, not just for marriage or other major decisions, but on a daily basis, before school and at bedtime. Such a practice is fundamentally Christian, yet it remains alive mostly in the memories and daily practices of Hindus and Muslims.

One must recognize, if Orthodox parents are not blessing their children with the Sign of the Cross, they can be fairly sure no one else is, either. And if we are not actively taking time, moment to moment, to warm our hearts and the hearts of our children by the embers of Orthodox practice still given us by God's grace, we can be sure that our hearts will not remain warm for long at all. 🍁

Internet search should turn up something.). That common religious memory has waned in our day, to the extent that most young faithful are not just unfamiliar with the manner in which grandma did things: the fact that she did anything at all in her home life that reflected her faith is highly unlikely.

We are faced with an opportunity to rediscover what still lies buried in living memory - a tradition we must either rediscover, or lose forever to the bloodless world of sociology textbooks.

For young (and not so young) Orthodox, the situation is the same, if not worse. Eager to abandon a foreign culture to become mainstream Canadians, two or three generations have unloaded a treasury of religious memories and practices that at one time enhanced every moment of every day. For our generation today, we are faced with an opportunity to rediscover what still lies buried in the living memory of Orthodox domestic tradition - a tradition we must either rediscover, or lose forever to the bloodless world of sociology textbooks.

We must rediscover what we have forgotten: the spiritual songs and troparia faithful knew well enough to sing in the home, while working or washing their faces. In conversation, we would be blessed if we could recover references to saints

On Mistakes and Heresies

"...There must be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you."
- 1 Cor. 11:19



"If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that."
- 1 John 5:16

For those who have found the fullness of Truth in Orthodoxy after leaving behind a heterodox confession, it is inevitable to experience a flood of questions about "getting it right". The zeal to achieve this goal is understandable, and even admirable in a time and place where the evangelical spirit and personal piety have faded in many places.

Yet there is an inherent risk with such zeal, a risk which finds itself summed up in the account of the Publican and the Pharisee: for those who take matters of faith seriously, the ever-present temptation to judge others can be spiritually lethal. The North American landscape makes this particularly challenging, dotted as it is with a plethora of examples of religious pluralism, strangeness, and - yes indeed, brethren - heresies.

In a pluralistic society, heresies - false teachings about Christ, His Church, and the nature of the human condition - abound. These are evident in the sugar-coated speeches given by civic leaders who do not wish to alienate any group of votes, however weird or wrong the group may be. This is seen among heterodox, who offer innovations and personal constructions as models for "reinventing" the Church - you know, the Church that is the Body of Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever?

Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky said and wrote things which were wrong, yet he willingly accepted correction.

Unfortunately, this is even seen among the Orthodox, who are tempted to flirt with falsehood, in order to be accepted by society at large, who would recast the secular mind of the world, and wrap it up nicely in paper festooned with three barred crosses. As the faithful recognize, such decoration does not make something Orthodox, and heresies - whether outside the Church or (especially) inside the Church, must be condemned. This is the purpose of the Sunday of Orthodoxy: to draw the line between Truth and error, and it is the responsibility of every Orthodox Christian to speak boldly and with love and

gentleness in its defense - even Canadian Orthodox, who suffer from the temptation of understatement in all things.

In our defense of Truth, we must exercise care in dishing out the verdict. There are individuals, including clergy, who preach heresy in our day. Yet there are many, many more who fall into something which resembles heresy, but which is far less damnable, and ultimately, more forgivable, and that is the reality of making mistakes.

The distinction between heresy and mistakes is an important one. Heretics hold a view that becomes an ideology, grabbing every opportunity to promote that ideology. Those who make mistakes (even doctrinal or spiritual ones), may repeat their errors, but the errors themselves do not become their identity, their reason for living. Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, whom many recognize as a saint, said and wrote things which were wrong, yet he willingly accepted correction from those in the Church who approached him with a loving spirit. He saw no need to carry on decades-long battles, to arrange public speaking tours or (in our day) to create virtual online libraries to smash the opposition. Holy people just don't seem to have that in them - which is of course what makes them holy.


In North America, there is certainly room enough for us to exist, to remain in communion with each other, and to still speak plainly - even fiercely - against falsehood, including occasions when that falsehood is the result of personal mistakes by clergy or bishops.

Similar questions confront us in the Church today, where criticisms of heresy are readily offered, where an accurate assessment would recognize that such views are often, in fact, mistakes in judgement, erroneous statements or choices often made with the best of intentions. Critics of the Gregorian Calendar can be tempted to cast it as a heresy, when in fact it was adopted by most westerners in good faith, despite the fact that this mistake caused and still causes huge divisions among Orthodox brethren - who *remain in communion with each other!* Those who participate in the so-called ecumenical movement with Protestants and Roman Catholics do so with the best of intentions, often finding themselves maneuvered into awkward "prayer services" which can compromise their reputation, and often their conscience - without ever intending to compromise their faith (although in cases where such actions scandalize the faithful, the responsive correction must by necessity be more swift). From liturgical innovations to pastoral over-leniency, the distinction between error and heresy is repeatedly presented to us, and in most cases, we find the former, not the latter.

Mistakes need correction: they do not need acrimony, mudslinging against the personal character of those involved, or schism. In North America, there is certainly room enough for us to exist, to remain in communion with each other, and to still

speak plainly - even fiercely - against falsehood, including occasions when that falsehood is the result of personal mistakes by clergy or bishops.

It is sometimes easy to take the tumble from error into heresy, but there is something that can save us from the fall, and that is humility. Humility is the spirit of reconciliation and repentance. Humility is the spirit which returned the erring apostle, and the unbelieving apostle, back to the Lord. Humility is the fruit of the Spirit of Truth, and where it is present, a thousand souls can be brought to repentance.

Without this spirit, however, we can push our brethren down the hill from error to heresy, schism, and apostasy, and in our zeal, share in their sin, leaving the evil one as the only one laughing as we fall. 

Gudrid: Canadian Anchorite

When the first Orthodox settlers to Canada returned home to Scandinavia around 1050, they left little behind them in the way of physical evidence of their venture to Canadian soil. The timbers and foundations in northern Newfoundland



have tempted archaeologists for decades with the promise of startling discoveries about the early Viking influence in Canada. On an archaeological level, these finds have been disappointing.

Yet for Orthodox Christians, the life of one of these settlers provides a remarkable insight into the spiritual life of one of our continent's earliest faithful, its first Orthodox mother, and its first female anchorite monastic. Her life, along with those of her brethren, is outlined in the famous Icelandic *Saga of Eric the Red*.

The woman Gudrid was likely born just before the year 1000AD, in Norway, at the beginning of the first missionary work in the region. Possibly one of the first Norse people to accept baptism, she eventually married the Viking Thorstein, brother of Leif Ericson. Thorstein died of illness, and Gudrid was widowed. She soon remarried, this time to Thorfinn Karlsefni.

It was this second marriage that was to prove providential for Gudrid, for within a year of her marriage, her husband Karlsefni undertook a voyage to the sought-after Vinland, located west of Greenland. While the location of Vinland is disputed, most authorities agree that Karlsefni and Gudrid and their company arrived in northern Newfoundland, where the group established the first European settlement in North America.

It was also the first settlement in the western world to include Orthodox Christians, evidenced from description of the burial rites of those who perished there, either through natural causes,



or in skirmishes with the local natives, whom the Vikings called Skrellings. Two major battles are detailed in the *Saga*, comprising perhaps the first ever Christian-pagan conflict in the west (although some of the Vikings were likely pagans as well), and certainly the first native vs. European one. Despite several attempts at establishing friendly trading relations between the two peoples, their common destiny was to be one of blood.

Hers was a life full of extensive experiences, struggles, and trials, a conversion from paganism to Christianity, the death of two husbands, and the birth of a child in a strange and foreign land. It was a life that foreshadowed the continuing spiritual attack on those who would ever dare put down the tiniest roots of Orthodox Christian faith in North American soil.

Gudrid had the distinction of giving birth to the first Canadian of European descent, her son Snorri, who was also the first Canadian-born to be baptized a Christian. It was beside the cradle of this same son that Gudrid stood when she experienced an encounter - a supernatural encounter - which would foreshadow both the fate of the tiny settlement, and her own calling as well.

The *Saga* relates:

Gudrid was sitting within, in the doorway, beside the cradle of her infant son, Snorri, when a shadow fell upon the door; and a woman in a black namkirtle entered. She was short in stature, and wore a fillet about her head; her hair was of a light chestnut color, and she was pale of hue, and so big-eyed that never before had eyes so large been seen in a human skull.

She went up to where Gudrid was seated, and said, "What is thy name?" "My name is Gudrid, but what is thy name?" "My name is Gudrid," says she.

The housewife Gudrid motioned her with her hand to a seat beside her; but it so happened that at that very instant Gudrid heard a great crash, whereupon the woman vanished, and at that same moment one of the Skrellings, who had tried to seize their weapons, was killed by one of Karlsefni's followers. At this the Skrellings fled precipitately, leaving their garments and wares behind them; and not a soul, save Gudrid alone, beheld this woman.

"Now we must needs takes counsel together," says Karlsefni; "for that I believe they will visit us a third time in great numbers, and attack us. Let us now adopt this plan.."

The Norsemen adopted a complex strategy of defense, which carried the day despite being outnumbered by the native attackers. Yet this encounter was to prove the end for the first Christian settlers in Canada. They remained until the spring, whereupon their leader Karlsefni announced that they would return to Greenland. A return voyage some years later saw a disastrous defeat of the Norsemen by the natives, followed by a bloody internecine struggle that left half the Norsemen and women dead in a single morning.

The strange visitation experienced by Gudrid bears a remarkable resemblance to the description of the demons encountered by Saint Herman in the Alaskan wilds centuries later. Gudrid's response to these events - the later death of her husband, the news of bloody chaos among the later settlers, and her return to the homeland she hoped to leave - inevitably led her to take up the life of an anchorite, a hermit-nun in then still-Orthodox Norway.

Hers was a life full of extensive experiences, struggles, and trials, a conversion from paganism to Christianity, the death of two husbands, and the birth of a child in a strange and foreign land. It was a life marked by travels almost unknown in the ancient world. And it was a life that saw a face-to-face encounter with a demonic apparition, an encounter which foreshadowed the continuing spiritual attack on those who would ever dare put down the tiniest roots of Orthodox Christian faith in North American soil. ❁

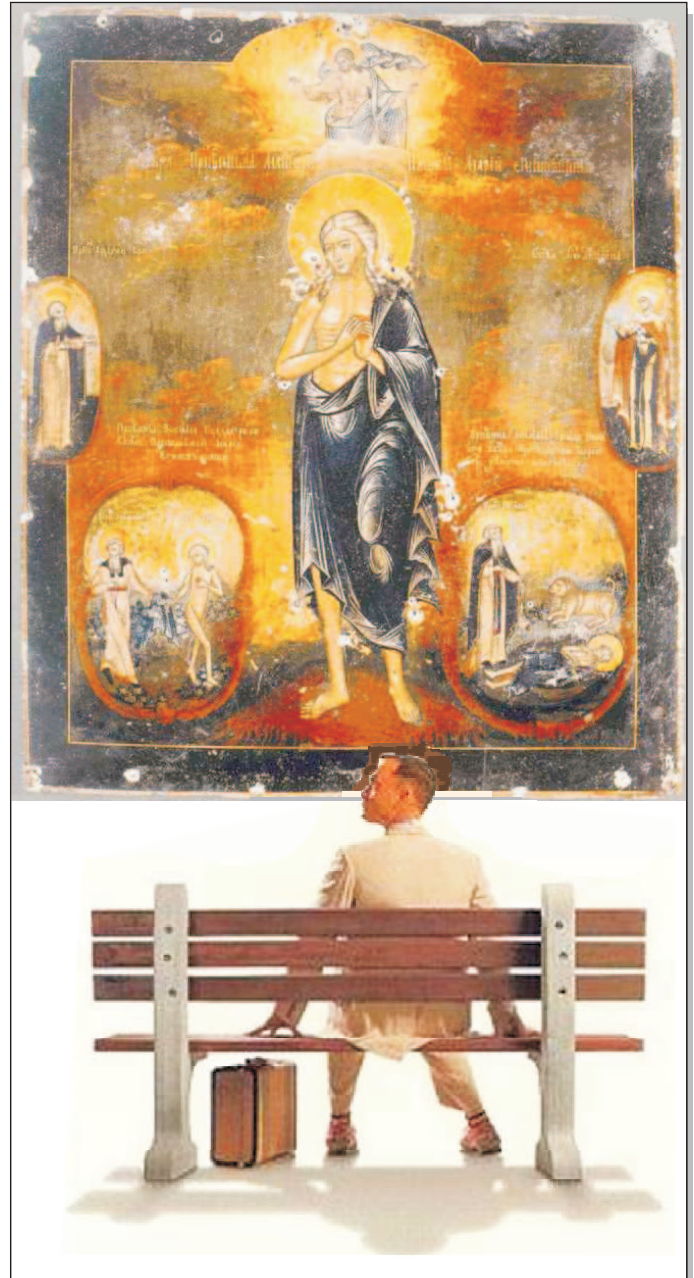
Tomb Hunters

Stupid Is as Stupid Does

"Do not try to teach people at large about devoutness and right living. I say this, not because I begrudge them such teaching, but because I think you will appear ridiculous to the stupid."

- St. Anthony, *On The Character of Men* (v.84), *Philokalia*.

After a year of hype over the historical creative writing assignment of the *DaVinci Code*, this Paschal season augured another example of anti-Christian media, with the announcement of the alleged "discovery" of the "real" tomb of Christ. Although the news and the discovery itself were old, and the fact that even atheist archaeologists rejected the claims, the matter drew a circus of media attention, right on cue with the beginning of Great Lent, offering the media hounds the



exposure they sought. Too bad the Holy Light at the Holy Sepulchre didn't generate such widespread attention.

Yet we must be consoled that such attention is passing away, along with all worldly wisdom and distractions. Drowning in the ocean of trivialities, it should not surprise us that most westerners - even among the Orthodox - are skeptical, since we feed on an intellectual and spiritual diet that is at best a dog's breakfast of half-truths and blatant lies, spiced up with a helping of plain theatre. How much better we are, as the prayers tell us, to seek a calm and peaceful life, in all godliness and dignity.

Truth - especially Eternal Truth (as if there is another kind) - simply takes too much time for people in a hurry. It takes some digging - true, spiritual digging - to find it. It takes time to allow it to permeate our distorted hearts. It takes a willingness to

actually seek the answers to the questions that trouble us, and to be willing to accept answers.

Skepticism looms large in the modern west, because our world deals in the currency of the sound bite. This is nothing new. The shallow, pseudo-Christian worldview that underpins the *DaVinci Code* and the tomb “discovery” is a case in point. Both maintain a certain historical understanding of Saint Mary Magdalene, and of the Mother of God, which are both fraudulent and deceiving, but which are not new. In the west, where the veneration of Saint Mary of Egypt was rolled in with the life of Saint Mary Magdalene (probably due to a confusion of the two similar names), Mary Magdalene has taken on an identity which was never historical - i.e. the identity of a prostitute. While Orthodox in the east continue to distinguish between the two lives and the two saints, the west, cut off from its connection with the living witness of the Church, pieces together an understanding of Saint Mary Magdalene from relatively recent sources, compiled after Rome split from the Orthodox Church in the eleventh century. The result is a historically distorted picture which heterodox Christians have a difficult time defending, and which opponents of Christianity have an easy time attacking: a target without a foundation is easily toppled.

The elimination of the proper honour given to the Mother of God is a second case in point. The Protestant and secular west, cut off from the earliest living understanding of the Church, is confronted with a vacuum in its understanding of the place of women in the church, and in the world. Nature abhors such a vacuum, so clever minds invent something to fill the vacuum, constructing a guide book to understanding Christian women, based on snippets of Scripture, strung together based on the wisdom of one ideology or another. Whether the results are radicalized feminism in certain sects, or groups like Promise Keepers, or the polygamist distortions of the Mormon cults, the roots are the same: buying Christianity by the sound bite, and reconstructing it using the human mind.

The seeds of the Church, and Her history, are indeed written in the blood of the martyrs. Yet North American culture is so often cut off from its witness, that we are easily drowned in a sea of

distorted trivialities. Many Orthodox Christians manage to hold fast to Holy Tradition, prayer, practice, and the lives of the saints, enabling them to stay afloat in this tumult. Yet there are also a significant number of Orthodox in Canada and the United States who are looking to keep up with the addled mind of western-style religion, to somehow defend the Church against the *DaVinci Codes* and tomb hunters of our day, using the “best” archaeology, the “latest” scriptural research, and the most “expert” opinions.

One can excuse, to a certain extent, the atheists and the heterodox, who although they unwittingly use the same methods for understanding the Church, at least have the excuse of ignorance of all or much of Holy Tradition, and the living witness of the practice of the Church throughout the ages.

For those Orthodox who remain enamoured with the cleverness of the wisdom of the modern age, one is hard pressed to find an explanation for their choices, apart from a stubborn arrogance which allows one the luxury of standing apart from the Church, and standing in judgement of Her. This, of course, offers no credible defense of the Faith that can stand up to attack from the critical media. What it does offer is confirmation of the Lord’s words about a tree and its fruits. 🍁

Canary in the Mineshaft *The End of Organized Religion*

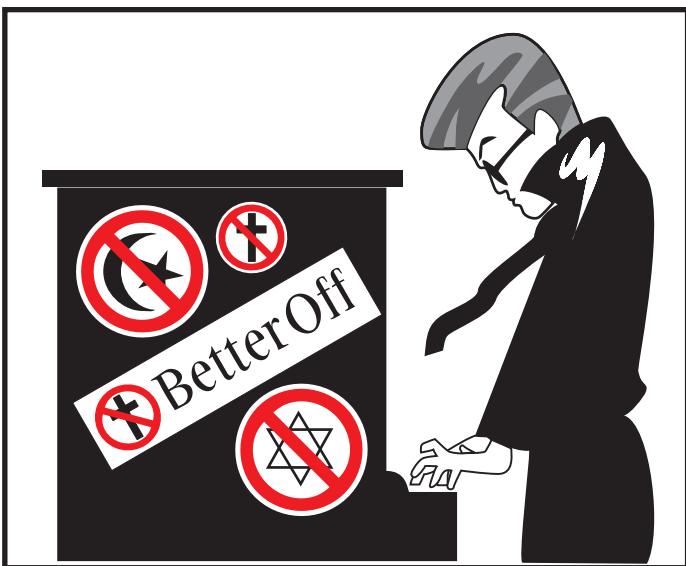
“In the last days, perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves... having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. From such men turn away.”

- 2 Timothy 3:1-2,5

Perhaps it is your uncle at Christmas dinner, an old school friend, or a work colleague: in every circle today there is at least one person who will condemn, or call for an end to, organized religion.


The forms of this quiet but growing movement are varied. One will raise the dangers of “militant” religion (not just terrorists, but those who advocate views different than “mainstream” - i.e. Secular, liberal, and materialistic views). Another will shroud his sentiments in vague praise for “spiritual” things: i.e. religion that sets its own rules, but which is completely relativistic. A third will even express a love of ancient Orthodox Christian symbols, and the beauty of icons - all very “mystical” in a vague sort of way - allowing spiritual feelings without requiring belief in anything in particular, like a Saturday trip to the art gallery, or a sweet encounter with “God on the beach”. Still others will suggest that the whole “problem of religion” can easily be solved if we simply put aside our differences (i.e. any beliefs which define the distinct reality of our faith), and concentrate on building a humanistic, pan-religious union, along the lines of the United Religions Movement.

Support for this *esprit du temps* is widely evident in the media. Religion, as a non-confrontational social force (i.e. any group that believes essentially the same things everyone else believes), is celebrated. “Fundamentalism” (i.e. any religion that believes something absolute) is a frequent target, wherein the media can often make a quick and easy jump from those who support prayer



in schools, to those who block entrance to abortion offices, to the Taliban, and back again. One big, troublesome mess it is, they say - and why can't it all just go away?

More and more, there are those who will argue not only that it *can* go away, but that it *should go away* - and the sooner the better. A decade or two ago, British pop star Elton John mused about the idea that one fine day in the future, men would be legally able to wed other men, and women to wed other women. In the mid 1980s, this seemed like the strange musings of an extravagant celebrity, prophesying a future which would never come to pass. This little prognostication came to mind several months ago, when the pop star once again offered his thoughts on the betterment of society, suggesting that all religions be legally banned, since they are inherently too divisive, harmful, and bigoted. Media coverage quipped that John's views were interesting, and bound to spark a debate about the role of religion in western society.

And so it begins... 

Life in a Northern Town

Liturgy Canadian Style

There has been much talk in the Church over the last four decades of building an indigenous Church for North America, with a local Typikon, icon style, and spiritual life that is fully Orthodox, while authentically North American. Because of demographic realities, these conversations usually take on the form of discussing an "American Orthodox Church" - a cute middle class white Anglo-American myopia that forgets Canadians, Mexicans, and most Americans as well. This ghetto of identity, born out of the ideas of progress of the American Revolution, stands ready to reform, reconstruct, and reimagine Orthodoxy in North America in its own sweet image, as American as mom and apple pie.

Of course, the myth of the progress of American identity is the myth of the revolutionary spirit: forget the past, or at least, rediscover something "ancient", and recast it for your own purposes. This is the basis of Protestantism: throw out Holy Tradition, and select tidbits from some early Church source that fit ideological goals. In Soviet Russia, they called this the Living Church; in North America, we call it mainstream.

America's cousin to the north has a different lineage, however. Canada's foundations rest in preserving traditions and traditional cultures. Sometimes this creates problems, and even conflicts, and often resorts to relativism in order to just get along with each other. Yet this traditional spirit - this fundamentally anti-revolutionary spirit - bears a marked similarity to the inheritance of Orthodox Tradition: the faithful caretaking of that which has been passed down from all generations before.

One of the reasons Protestant sectarianism has had such success in America, is that the revolutionary philosophy holds in itself the need to constantly invent new things. It is a germ that infects Orthodox life as well. When Orthodox academics look to identify things that are "American Orthodox", they are usually fueled by two opposing spirits, a carrot and a stick, if you will.

The stick that repels and motivates those who would tinker with the spiritual life of the Church is a fundamental rejection of anything from other Orthodox cultures. There exists an inferiority complex in some circles today that yearns to see Orthodoxy in


North America as something special on the international stage at Orthodox gatherings. And so, those who would tinker with liturgical life, with the spiritual life of the Church, do so with something to prove - if not to the world, then at least to themselves.

The carrot is the temptation of innovation: the love of the new, and the different. This can take all sorts of forms, but these are all inevitably borrowed from foreign sources, sources outside the Church: raising hands in the style of the charismatics, structuring sermons based on Baptist methodology, gushy emotionalism in the prayers, or a cacophonous exchange of the kiss of peace among the laity in a style borrowed from Protestantism. The root of this euphoria is a sense that these innovations are somehow our identity as Orthodox North Americans. The reality is, our roots are far from this.

Sadly, those who counter this ecumaniacal strangeness often invoke a nostalgia for all things foreign: foreign language in the Liturgy, foreign loyalties and conversation, and foreign food after the services. Ultimately, these defenses fall flat, because they are as irrelevant to authentic Canadian Orthodox life as the strangeness they attempt to counter.

Unlike the revolutionary spirit of the Americans (with the notable exception of the faithful in Alaska), Orthodox in Canada are not a rootless people. The faith of the immigrants of the last two centuries is alive and well in our cities and towns. What is more, the faith of the Celts of a millennium ago, the Viking Christians of the tenth century, and possibly others - their Church life is also our inheritance. A Canadian Orthodox liturgical identity can only be built on these broad, timeless, and authentically Orthodox foundations.

So what do these foundations resemble? Contrary to the distortions of some quarters, these foundations show us a shared Orthodox inheritance and liturgical life which is remarkable in its universality. All are fundamentally traditional; all boast a deep, common monastic life (compare Celtic and Egyptian monasteries). All reverently approach the Liturgy with full icon screens (the Byzantine and Slavic iconostases differ from the Frankish, the Celtic, the Roman, the Viking, and the Anglo-Saxon only in materials and in the exact placement of icons). All offer the priestly prayers silently (whether on the Holy Mountain, at the monastery of Sarov in Russia, or in the Sarum rite of Orthodox England). All preserve a solemnity of worship and reverence within holy places (no one claps their hands in the Holy Sepulcher, or in the ancient Cathedrals of Orthodox Europe). All even share the same blessings of the faithful by the priest before Holy Communion.

Any authentic Canadian Orthodox liturgical life can only be built upon this common foundation. Anything borrowed from Protestant-style dabbling within the Orthodox academic setting will simply not stand the test of time. What is more, it will not be an authentic inheritance of the Orthodox Tradition in Canada, or anyplace else - it will be a fraud, created by design, in a spirit foreign to the Church. For the faith of the Church, the liturgy and prayers of the Church, come from the Faith of the Fathers. It is these Fathers, and not the fathers of revolution who are the authentic forebears of Orthodoxy in Canada. 

A Few Great Men *Whither Saint Gregory?*

“Much might be said of his imperishable genius, which was unimpaired even by the most severe physical afflictions; for while other popes devoted themselves to building churches and adorning them with silver and gold, Gregory’s sole concern was to save souls,” - Venerable Bede, on the repose of St. Gregory, Pope of Rome, in 605 A.D.

Saint Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome while that great western sea still held the Orthodox Faith long before the Schism of 1054, was what one might call an unexpected missionary. A Roman Church envoy to Constantinople, it was quite possible that the saint would have only been known to us for the magnificent chant that bears his name in the Orthodox West, had it not been for the divine providence which brought him to the Roman slave market.

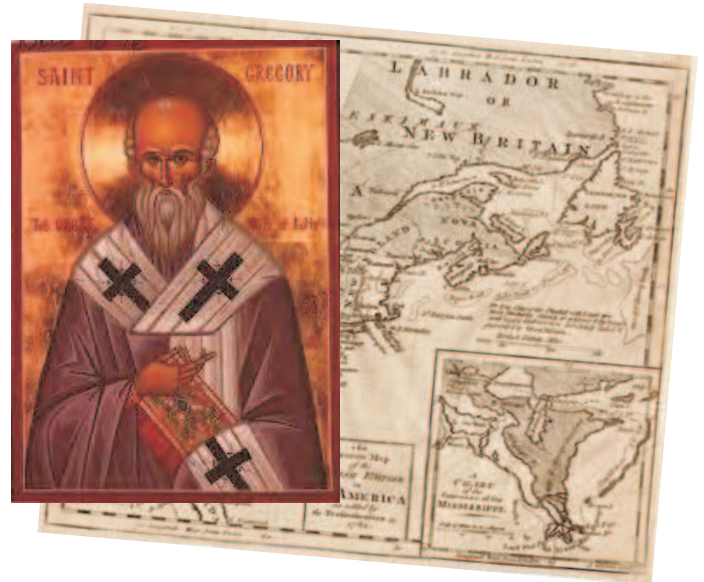
It was here that Saint Gregory saw for the first time English-speaking people, whom he declared bore the likeness of angels, and it was here that he declared his intention to bring the Gospel to their land. As history tells us, Gregory did not get his wish: instead, he was made Patriarch of Rome. Yet it is in this unanticipated event that the door opened to bring the English speaking world to Christ’s Holy Church - a door that remains open to us to this day.

Saint Gregory presents to us a true apostle to a nation: a nation he never visited, but which benefitted incalculably from the missionaries he dispatched and supported. What makes such an apostle? Saint Gregory set a priority in first building up authentic monastic foundations in his English mission field, constructing and supplying monasteries, filling them with monastics from abroad who could pass on their living experience to a new nation of monastics. It was not enough to have monastic vocations reading in isolation about monastic life: Saint Gregory saw to it that this life was transmitted in an ongoing, comprehensive way, in order to allow it to put down roots.

This Orthodox patriarch of the west also provided for the needs of poor and missionaries from his own pockets. This approach assumes stable churches which provide extra monies to their bishop, voluntarily, for this purpose (one can imagine a Canadian missions fund, providing for the growth of domestic missions just as did Saint Paul’s collections from and for various churches).

In this unanticipated event - Saint Gregory’s elevation as Patriarch of Rome - the door opened to bring the English speaking world to Christ’s Holy Church. The same door remains open to us to this day.

The true greatness of the saint is perhaps best manifested in the fact that he looked beyond his own people. The Venerable Bede tells us that he encountered the first Angles in a slave market in Rome, and was saddened when he was not able to personally carry out his dream to do mission work to these “angels”. As Pope of




Rome, he was later in an unequalled position to support such work.

For the Orthodox in Canada, one lesson from Saint Gregory the Great is perhaps most poignant: he was never interested in building a colony of his own people in a far-off land. In fact, it is very difficult to think of a saint who ever tried to do this; it is simply jurisdiction building, a sickness that afflicts every jurisdiction in North America today. Saints were and are always interested in building up the Church, especially in doing everything it takes to bring others to the Faith (we can note Saint Gregory’s letter to Saint Augustine of Canterbury on the importance of apprehending anything pagan that is redeemable: pagan Angles and Celts were never forced to be Romans in order to be Christians).

Sadly, in Canada such holiness is so often missing, with a great amount of attention paid to serving “my people” and “my nation”, with no attention in many quarters to missionary work. If there is any doubt on this point, one might check to see which jurisdictions have a budget and clergy dedicated specifically to mission work to Canadians who are not already Orthodox; this is of course the way the saints always did things, while others chose the opposite path.

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Where will such saintly bishops be found in our time, in our country? Perhaps they already exist; perhaps there even exist some who have not yet begun their saintly work, whose sanctity will be revealed as they see the futility and spiritual dead-end of building a jurisdiction, rather than labouring for the universal mission of the Gospel of Christ, as the saints always did.

Perhaps Canada is a land full of such missionary saints-in-waiting. Perhaps. 

Where's the Party? A political home for Orthodox Christians in Canada?

"My Kingdom is not of this world," - John 18:36

Most Orthodox Christians across time and place would certainly agree that there cannot be an Orthodox political party. Even the Orthodox empires of Byzantium and Holy Russia were states made up of people of varied faithfulness; the two-headed eagle reflects the correction the Church and its saints often had to give to the state (interestingly, the United States has a one-headed eagle, like pagan Rome).

Canadian political parties all have shortcomings: some will compromise on the care of those who are in need, some will sacrifice critical moral issues like marriage and abortion, and all of them miss the fundamental orientation that this world is only a tip of the iceberg of the universal reality of human life.

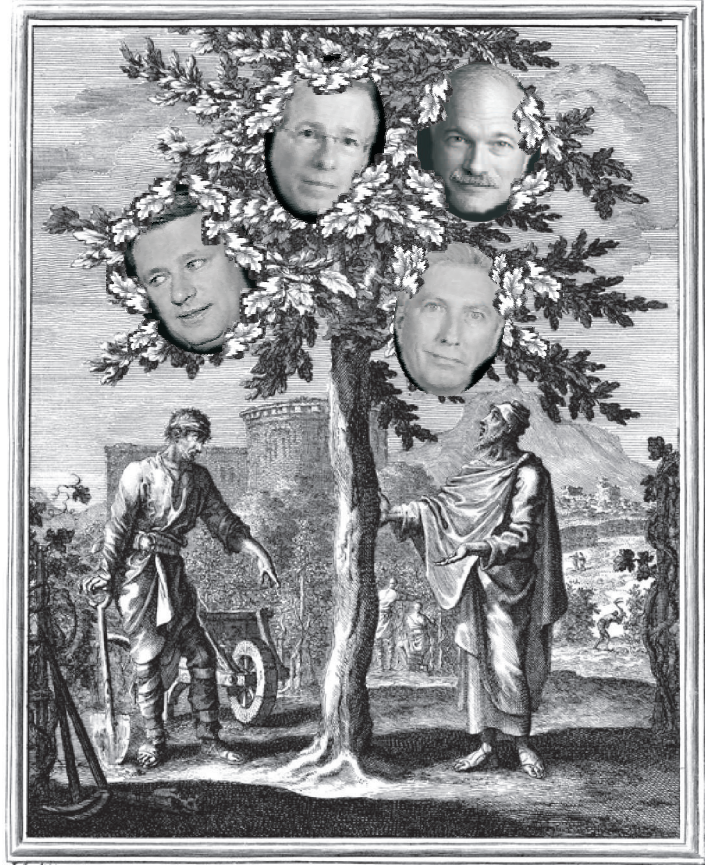
All this being said, what would a Canadian political party look like, in terms of policies, for Orthodox Christians to be able to vote for it with a clear (or clearer) conscience? As we approach the next national election, we might consider the following factors, which should inform our conscience as Orthodox Christians as we approach the ballot box:

A multicultural outlook: Most traditional cultures take a similar approach on issues of basic moral issues, like family, support and role of the elderly, abortion, marriage, sexual issues; Christians, along with traditional Indian Hindus and Sikhs, most Buddhists, and to a certain extent Muslims have some common ground here, which does not find its way onto the stage of Canadian politics (most politicians from these backgrounds either hide or dispute the foundational beliefs of their own religion). Authentic, traditional cultures have a moral common ground with each other on many issues than they do with secular, western popular culture. These common issues are the ones usually in Canadian public life.

Solid Moral Tradition: Orthodox Christians would look for candidates and parties who would protect the traditional definition of marriage, and which would allow religious groups freedom from state control on questions such as to whom religious groups should be required to offer rites. Similarly, one would look for leadership that would protect employee freedom of conscience on medical issues (such as participation in organ donation or abortion), or the promotion of sexual immorality in printed or electronic forms.

A Charitable Outlook: Orthodox Christians might look for a government that would match dollar-for dollar the charitable efforts of churches, turning the institutional face of social services into a human face. As Saint John Chrysostom suggests, such initiatives could set up a house of charity in every city, or provide a full 50% tax rebate for all charitable gifts (i.e. one can either pay the government, or give it to support good works).

Free the Workforce: Work time is destroying families, who provide the essential character builder in any healthy society. Institutions can never fill this void, since institutions cannot ever provide *love* - only human beings can do that, and only voluntarily (e.g. one may pay a public employee more for various good



reasons, but that pay does not determine the amount of love they can or will offer). To this end, Orthodox Christians might look for a government that would stop taxation on stay-at-home parents, and dramatically cut taxes for parents who work for limited hours or limited wages. One might strengthen poorer families by offering them more time together, without a tax on any benefits, or on minimal pay, or set a maximum number of hours for the work week, and stick with it (perhaps setting a huge double- or triple-time rate for those working over forty hours). Such leadership could make it easier for lowest paid jobs (the Walmart folks) to organize, while putting strict limitations on the greed that can drive larger unions to paralyze communities in order to obtain higher pay. One might also look for leadership that would make profit-sharing a benefit for private businesses, by offering meaningful tax incentives to companies who share their profits with their share-holding employees, building closer ties within each workplace.

All Politics is Local: It is very difficult to have faith meaningfully influence representatives who are few in number, and far from the people whom they represent. Since Canada covers the largest area of any democratic country in the world (one can argue about Russia), one might look for leadership that advocates more representatives who are paid less, and who make many more significant decisions at a local level. In the spirit of the village church of all times and places, one might seek a government that gave town halls back to local communities dealing with local transportation, safety, and other issues, purchasing services from a common central provider,

Clean up the Country: Sensibly, Orthodox Christians would look for the same standards on air and water pollution as laws for littering, phased in over a few years. Since automobiles are a major source of pollution, allocate most resources to clean-driving cars, and eliminate the tax on them.

As Orthodox Christians, the exercise of conscience at the ballot box is essential, not in terms of achieving an untenable pipe dream of a theocracy, but as an integral part of living an Orthodox Christian life in a country that tries to operate as a democracy. Just as we choose our activities, our friends, our spouse, and even our foods as Orthodox Christians, so too we must exercise our franchise with the same conscience. 🍁

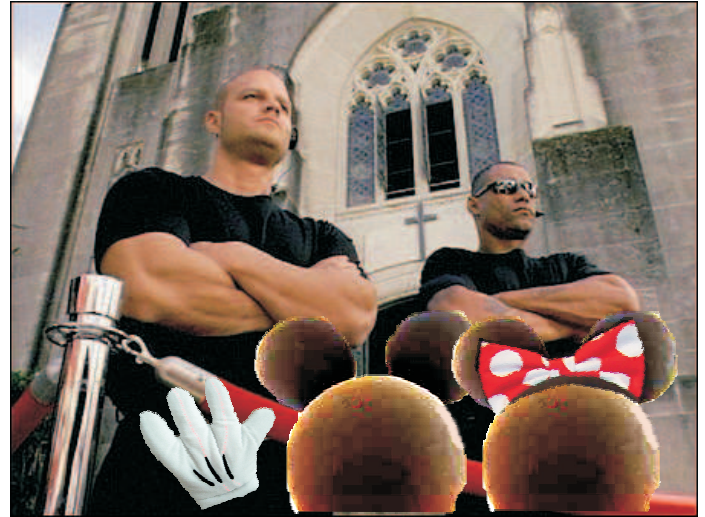
Mickey Mouse Matrimony: *The Disneyfication of Religion*

Marriage has been a central building block of society in every civilization. Far from a private affair, or one which is dictated by personal whims and tastes, marriage has been recognized as the beginning of a journey which is at best challenging, at worst difficult, and ultimately critical to a stable family life. The ancient marriage rite of the Church places every marriage within the context of the marriages which have gone before: the marriages of the patriarchs of the Old Testament are invoked in the prayers of matrimony, the prayers of the saints are sought for the blessing of the couple with children according to the will of God, and the Presence of the Lord Himself in the Holy Mystery of Marriage is invoked to bless the union of the man and wife. Marriage takes place within the context of the whole Church down through the ages: no couple enters it alone, since the holy witness of the Church recognizes that alone, a marriage can only end in failure.

In the real world, there is a vast difference between a wedding and a marriage.

The American corporation that poses as a theme park recently announced it was expanding its menu of options for couples who dream of a wedding in fantasyland. The Disney Corporation, which has for years sponsored weddings in its theme parks, is expanding its line of princess rental dresses for brides who want to look like Cinderella for a day. Available settings for the one-day affairs range from a Polynesian setting, to a beach party, to a romantic castle retreat.

Notably absent from the menu was any sense of marriage within the context of the Church. Like much of the religious culture of our time, a Disney wedding is plug-and-play, marriage a-la-carte, or as the classic series of paintings by the British painter Hogarth was entitled, *Marriage-à-la-mode* (that is, marriage according to current fashion, not marriage with ice cream - although this is certainly an option at the Disney theme parks). Weddings at Disney begin to look so much like the rest of our popular culture, a sad exercise of opt-in, opt-out consumerism, with the focus on the experience, much like a



vacation escape.

In the real world, there is a vast difference between a wedding and a marriage. The need for long term endurance and stability is the key to love and joy in a marriage and in a family. This is the very reason that the Orthodox Christian marriage service is rooted in eternal things: because eternal things survive, where fantasies fail.


Much of what passes for “spirituality” in western culture is all about fantasy and escaping reality. It is no surprise that many pragmatists reject such indulgence as spiritual fluff - because it is fluff. Still many others, eager to give a spiritual flavour to their fantasy world, adopt it *ad hoc*; this has been the basis of many quarters of emotion-driven Protestantism and “charismatic” Roman Catholicism for the last few centuries. Both rationalism and spiritual fluffiness fail when it comes to living an authentic Christian life, as Saint Gregory Palamas teaches, and so many of the Church Fathers affirm. Knowing God is something much more than clever thinking; it is certainly much more than living out candy-coated fantasies.

Of course, the Disney Corporation does not enlist the Church Fathers as wedding consultants. If it did, fairy tale castles and coaches, along with fantasy settings and marriages on the beach would not be found on the guest options list. The Disney menu offers a selection far more consumable - far more easily sold.

Several years ago, a hurricane hit the Disney theme park in Florida, doing limited damage, but leaving a startling mark on the facade that most visitors see. Building exteriors which gave the illusion of permanence were overnight revealed to be nothing more than brightly coloured pressboard, held with rivets to ugly steel frames, hardly the stuff on which the foundations of childhood, married life, or faith should be built. Those who entered the park in the hours after the cleanup caught just a glimpse of this reality, as crews rushed to restore the cheery theme park illusion. The park in the hurricane; the Disney wedding; the glass coach: this is the spirituality of fantasyland.

For Canadians who often define themselves based on our differences with Americans, and as Orthodox Christians seeking the depths of the authentic Christian Church, we might ask ourselves which world we aspire to emulate more, in our weddings, in our marriages, and in our lives. The two choices

could not be more different: life in Christ is true life, because it is Eternal Life, while fantasyland religion is false life, a shadow and a dream, as the Orthodox memorial service puts it.

And glass coaches and slippers, like the dreams on which they are built, are easily -and inevitably - shattered. 

Scrambling the Ghetto Keeping the Kids

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things," - 1 Cor. 13:11

Much attention is given in Orthodox parishes to the need for ministry to young people. For some, part of this desire is born out of a general decline in youth attendance, often mixed with pious jealousy at the perceived strengths of the youth groups in evangelical Protestant churches. Shamed by the neighbours, many Orthodox fall pray to the temptation to try to offer a peculiar blend of Canadian-style social activities in order to preserve a youth cluster in an ethnic ghetto - and in the process, come up with absolutely zero from a spiritual perspective.

Within individual parishes, the common ground often has little to do with faith: youth in particular come from homes with radically different levels of piety and radically different ideas of what the Church means to their lives. It becomes very easy within a parish for youth (and adults, as well) to concentrate on simpler things they have in common, and in most cases in Canada, this means culture.


The problem arises when, almost inevitably, young people decide they want to fit in with the Canadian youth mainstream: no more *baba* or *spanakopita* or dancing or Heritage Language class on Thursday night. All that was fine when I was eight years old; now I will live like a Canadian, pray like a Canadian (i.e. not at all), and marry someone who shall deliver me from the ethnic ghetto. I will have arrived - this is the Canadian dream, yes?

As Orthodox in Canada, we fool ourselves when we believe that better dance classes, Heritage Language classes, and cultural history will save the faith of our kids: they will not. What will make a giant difference is doing everything we can, from an early age, to build friendships between Orthodox Christian children and youth.

By necessity, this can only take place in an environment in which students cannot fall back into their cultural communities - at least, for a little while. It requires regular, perhaps weekly, gatherings of Orthodox young people from all backgrounds, to concentrate on the prayers of the Church, and offering the answers the Faith gives to the pressing questions young people have: friendship, romance, sex, the media, technology, music, abortion, homosexuality, advertising, and politics, to name a few things. It also requires faithful people who know and live Orthodox lives, who do not make up answers on the spot to serious questions of faith, but who know the mind of the Church Fathers, who speak loudly on all these questions.


Ninety percent of Orthodox youth in Canada marry someone from a background outside the Orthodox Faith (Serbs are the

notable exception, for the time being). If Orthodox faithful actually believe their own dreams that a younger generation will gradually take up bearing the torch in caring for their parishes and the Orthodox Faith, they must summon up the courage to do what it takes to allow their children and grandchildren to build solid, ongoing friendships based on our common Faith which endures, unto ages of ages. For their sake, we must all grow up.


If and when the nationalist songs fade, the dances are forgotten, and the faith of our Orthodox grandchildren survive, we will at least then have some hope of hearing the Lord say, "Well done, good and faithful servant". 

Poetry: Awake, My Soul!

Awake, My Soul! Believe what thou hast seen!
For thou hast seen the Light of Truth revealed!
Though deep within thee lieth it concealed,
Thou needest but to rouse thyself. So mean
Art thou to slumber when the merest keen
And crystal ray of joy thine eyes unsealed
And showed thee thy true state. Why dost thou yield
Unto the dream, when wakened thou hast been?

How can the dream be better than The Truth,
Or passing laughter sweeter be than Joy
Unmixed with pain, as noon undimmed by night?
My Soul, be not so slothful or uncouth
To barter thy salvation for a toy!
Awake! Arise! Get thee unto the fight! 

- Sara Hillis


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A Journal of Orthodox Christianity

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