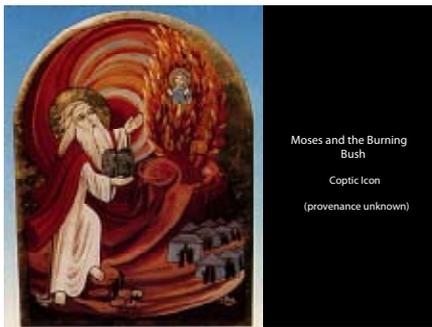


Christian Behaviour

By Professor David Frost

Today we talk about ‘Christian Behaviour’. ‘How should I relate to people in my daily life?’ But before we can begin to answer that, there is a far more important question: ‘How should I relate to God?’ Get that right and all the rest will follow.



Visual Aid 1:

Icon of Moses and the Burning Bush

‘No Dirty Boots’

I want to begin by reading a passage from the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament, where we are told how Moses meets the unknown God, who, when asked his name, will say only that He is: ‘I AM WHO I AM’ (Exodus 3:14).

‘Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro ... And the angel of the Lord appeared to him ([Moses]) in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed ... When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here am I.” Then he said, “Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”’ (Exodus 3:1-5).

What does Moses feel himself called to do when he meets this unknown God? He hears an immediate demand to clean himself up. – ‘No dirty boots!’ – Like a Muslim entering a mosque, like a Hindu coming into another person’s home, he must put off his shoes – shoes that are soiled with the dust and mud and excrement and refuse of where he has been up until now. “The place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

An encounter with the living God seems immediately to create a demand for holiness, and in limited, ‘fallen’ human beings a sense of being ‘unclean’, ‘not right’, of needing and wanting to do something about it. We feel a gap, a distance between ourselves and what we have encountered – a gap that hurts, one that we want to bridge.

This is true, even of experiences where the person may not consciously understand that they are in the presence of God. Confronted by the beauty and amazing variety of nature,

the environmentalist feels outraged that we wantonly destroy that beauty and variety. The quality of what is there (which Christians would say is an expression of God in his creation) seems to demand something from us. Similarly, the animal-lover, responding to the otherness, the strangeness, the mystery and beauty of the other living creatures, is appalled that we should exploit them (and even exterminate them) for our own selfish ends. On the more positive side, the birth of a child, the miracle of a new creation, seems to stir extraordinary joy and delight, even in people who feel they have little or no experience of God. Children, as the saying goes, 'bring their own love with them'; they create in us a wish to care, nurture, protect and cherish them.

Fulfilling the Impulse to Holiness

My point is that this reaction is natural to us: we have in us a God-implanted, God-triggered *impulse to holiness*. The Orthodox Church insists that man was created good; and even though (to quote the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom) 'we have fallen away' from what we were meant to be, we have not entirely forgotten. Nudges from outside ourselves keep calling us to be better than we are. The great religions of the world have almost all developed rules, codes of behaviour, to meet this need. There is a wealth of guidance as to what you should do, and even more as to what you should *not* do.

'Nobadaddy': the False Image of God

I want now to show you what I will call a *counter-icon*. It is not a Christian image conveying a truth about God; rather, it is an image of a terrible and false alternative, which can, nevertheless, show us something we can learn from.



*Visual Aid 2:
Blake's image of 'Nobadaddy'*

This is an image by the English poet and artist William Blake, of the God whom he thought was worshipped by Jews in their synagogues and by Christians in their churches.

Blake called this figure 'Nobadaddy', because he was 'nobody's Daddy' – not in any way a loving Father. Instead, he is a terrible old man, blind and vengeful, hurling down lightning and thunderbolts of wrath on human beings who have offended him. He is the cruel tormentor whom Blake thinks has cursed man with an enormous Book of Rules which we are bullied into keeping, and punished if we break. At the bottom of the picture is the crushed human race, and to the right the artist has put a representative human being, bowed down under the divine anger, the knife still in his hand with which he has killed his fellow man. For Blake, this tyrant God is the enemy of love, frustrating our desires, denying us freedom, spontaneity, pleasure and joy. The Church and the State are his twin instruments of terror and repression. Try to keep the rules of this God, and he will design you a hundred more rules to keep you crushed, humbled and guilty. He is the blight of the minds that know him – give him his chance, and he

will turn you into a vengeful, moralizing, censorious and destructive monster like himself.

If this is your picture of God – and most of us have a corner for it in our minds – take it out and burn it. Beg God’s forgiveness for slandering him so. Throw it away, for it is a dangerous and destructive lie, an offence against the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How do we know? Because we have heard and seen what Jesus Christ was and is – and we have his own saying: ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9). If the Old Testament on its own sometimes gives the impression that Blake may have more than a grain of truth in what he says, remember that the Orthodox Church teaches that everything in the Old Testament must be understood in the light of the revelation of God that is Jesus Christ.

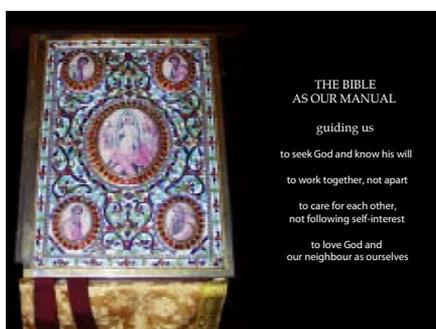
The False Picture of What Christians Are

In my lifetime, nothing has done the Christian faith more harm than this false picture of God. It reflects badly on his followers. In Australia, we accuse Christians of being ‘wowsers’: wowsers are kill-joys, people unable to have fun themselves, determined to prevent others having a good time. Christians are thought of as people who are against booze, drugs, and sex (in particular). They are frightened to let themselves go and keen to stop anyone else doing so. They are choked with moral inhibitions, like an egg-bound chicken.

The True Image of Christians

If that is how I, as a Christian, look to you – like an egg-bound chicken – then there is something wrong. Jesus said ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (John 10:10). And that doesn’t mean just life in some future state: ‘the Kingdom of heaven is in the midst of you (within you)’ (Luke 17:21) – heavenly life starts now. The Roman Catholic Church, before it recognizes a saint, asks if that person had *hilaritas* – joyfulness. If Christians don’t look joyful to you, full of life, it may be that you are not looking hard enough – but it is more likely that we still have a lot to learn, or even that we are not yet fully disciples of Jesus.

But (you may say) surely Christians are against booze, drugs, sex and such. The answer is that God created all things good: it is only their misuse that Christians oppose (or to be more truthful, only their misuse that Christians *ought* to oppose). Drugs can be medicinal or (like caffeine) a generally harmless pick-me-up; sexual love was made to be delightful; wine, as the Psalmist says, is ‘to gladden the heart of man’ (Psalm 104:15). My second daughter thanks God that we have a religion that puts wine at the centre of its ritual!



Visual Aid 3: The Bible as our Manual

As for human behaviour, Christians would say that we have in the Bible a manual that describes how human beings function best: by seeking to know God and his will for us; by working together and not apart from one another; by caring for each other rather than following

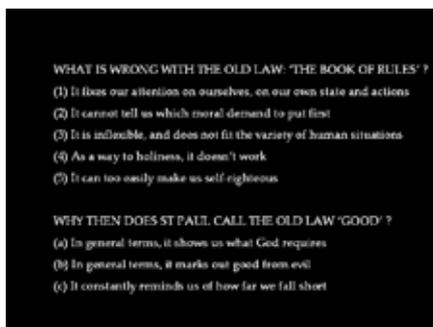
self-interest. As with the manual for a motor car, there is a list of dos and don'ts: love drives the engine, hate clogs it up. You can't *prove* that selfishness wrecks the machine or damages other traffic on the road, just by reading that in the manual; but try putting hatred in your tank as the driving force, and you'll grind to a halt soon enough. The Social Darwinism that is so fashionable at present, which argues that we are driven by 'selfish genes', that we are by nature ruthlessly and selfishly competitive, and which also implies that this is inevitable and productive – that creed is a recipe for disaster. Try living like that, and you and your community will break down, sick and self-disgusted. We were made to live in a community of love, and only Christ can lead you back to where you long to be.¹

A Unique Way to Holiness

If many faiths respond to a human need for holiness, there is one major difference between Christianity and all the other religions I can think of. Stay for a moment with my image of the motor-car manual. A number of creeds can offer instructions for how we human beings work best, and most can offer human teachers, gurus, who will give us their idea of what their particular manual is saying. We Christians do not ignore the manual given to the Jews in the Old Testament, the Jewish Law. But we have something radically different: instead of just a book of instructions, we belong in a workshop where we have a living instructor, who not only invented us, body and soul, but who built the repair-section himself. He works along with us, showing us by what he says and does how the human machine works, how to put it right when it's gone wrong, and how to keep it in good order.

The Old Law: Its Weaknesses and Strengths

Why is the old way of governing our behaviour, the Book of Rules, inadequate to our need? Since even the best Christians among us sometimes feel tempted to go back to the Book of Rules and try by human effort to live by them – to do what St Paul calls 'going again under the Law' (see Galatians 4:21) – we need to know why that doesn't work.



Visual Aid 4: The Old Law

First, it directs the attention of us God-deprived human beings to ourselves and our own behaviour. I'm going to say something rather shocking, especially to people like me who were sent to church by unbelieving parents to 'learn the difference between right and wrong'. *Christianity is not primarily about being good.* Its main purpose is to know and love God, and our fellow human beings as ourself. Good and evil in Christian terms are harmony with God's will or departure from it. God's way – or not God's way. Being good, being holy, means being aligned with God, and that follows naturally from knowing and loving Him, not from moral efforts to be good.

A second problem with the Book of Rules, the Old Law, is that it can't tell us which of its moral demands we should put first at any given time. There are only twenty four hours in a

day – that is, presuming you need no sleep. Tomorrow is a new day. Should you occupy it by ‘Honour(ing) your father and mother’ (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16) and pay Mum that long-promised visit? Or should you rather ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’ (Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25), and spend the time doing your tax return? Or maybe you should heed Christ’s warning as to the judgement that awaits those who neglect the sick (Matthew 25:36-46) and go and see that friend who’s just gone into hospital? Any reasonably conscientious person will end their day feeling exhausted and guilty at having done only a fraction of what the Book of Rules says they ought to have done.

A third problem is that the Old Law, the Book of Rules, is inflexible. It can’t be applied in all the variety of human situations without leading us to do something dreadful. Take the general condemnation of lying, deceit – most of us would go along with that. Pope John Paul II is on record as saying that a lie is always evil, always a ‘sin’. I might go along with the idea that a lie is always evil, since any deceit between human beings is a breach of the loving trust that should exist between us. But as for a lie being always a ‘sin’, consider for a moment a favourite problem posed by moralists. Imagine, they say, that you are in Germany under Hitler and you have hidden some Jewish friends in your attic. The SS come to your door and ask ‘Are there Jews in your house?’ Do you answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No’? If you hesitate or refuse to answer, that will be taken as a ‘Yes’. What does the moral law, which condemns lying, require of you here? And what is the love of Christ asking you to do?

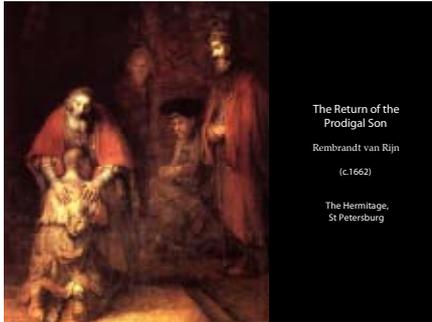
Let’s pray you never have to face such a test. But here is a more ordinary problem. You have a friend who has an absolutely hideous, disfiguring birthmark, all down one side of her face. In consequence, she feels awful about herself – sometimes, suicidal. One day, she puts you on the spot. ‘David, I want you to be absolutely straight with me. Do I look ugly?’ What is the love of Christ calling you to say? Is it: ‘Well, yes, darling, you do look ghastly – but we love you anyway’. Would a fib there have been a sin?²

The last problem is the greatest of all: as a way to holiness, to goodness, the Old Law, the Book of Rules, doesn’t work. As most of us know to our cost, we keep the rules for a while, then come crashing down, feel wretched, then start all over again, and crash once more. Perhaps it is as well this happens – for the occasional person who thinks they have succeeded turns into a monster of self-righteousness, tut-tutting about the wrongdoing of others, thanking God that he or she is ‘not like other men’ (Luke 18:9-14). All of us enjoy a bit of picking holes in other people and the Law gives us sinners wonderful opportunities to do so. We need to remember that when Jesus Christ, in his earthy life, was harsh on anyone, it was on those people who thought themselves better than others.

You may think it odd that St Paul, who is so convinced that we need to be rescued from Law, still thinks of the Law as good (Romans 7:13; 1 Timothy 1:8). In general terms, Law shows us what God requires, marking out what is good and what is evil, and it reminds us constantly of how far we fall short (Romans 7:7). So we can put some real oomph into those responses throughout the Liturgy: *Lord, have mercy*’.

But when we feel how much we need God to be easy on us, the problem is that the Law provides no way out. The Old Testament sacrifices of bulls and goats to make amends are no longer practised, even among the Jews. However, St Paul says that the Law leads us to

Christ (Romans 5:20-21) – and it does that because it brings us eventually to despair of ourselves and our human efforts. When we have tried and failed so many times, desperation brings us to the point where we are prepared to say to God: ‘I give up. I can’t do anything about myself. Unless you do something, nothing can be done. Please *take me over.*’



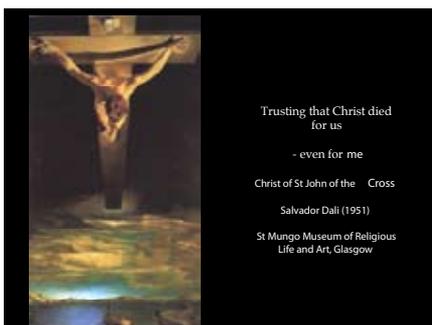
Visual Aid 5: *The Prodigal Son*

That point of self-surrender, of what the scriptures call ‘dying to self, living to Christ’, is bitterly hard – and most of us have to do it again and again. The initial ‘turning to Christ’ was done for most of us at our baptism when we were tiny; but the whole of our lives will be activating that commitment, repeating the handover time after time.

‘A More Excellent Way’: Christ within Us

St Seraphim of Sarov was fond of saying that the whole purpose of life was to acquire the Holy Spirit. That is why the Orthodox Church does not produce great tomes of moral theology or 600 page catechisms that try to tell you in every situation what would be right or what would be wrong, what is ‘venial’ sin (not too serious) or ‘mortal’ (soul-killing) sin. The Orthodox Church doesn’t go about holiness by watching points. We try to call the heart, mind and spirit of Jesus into us, so that there is no need to watch points.

But how on earth is that to be done? First, by *humility*: by recognizing that, unless Christ comes to our rescue, we can do nothing about our sick and sinful state. Second, by *faith*, by *trusting* that Christ died for us – even that he died for *me*.



Visual Aid 6: *Christ of St John of the Cross*

Third, by *trusting* Christ’s promise that, if only we will surrender to him, he will take us over. Fourth, by *praying* for that to happen. Fifth, by *studying Christ’s actions and words* in the scriptures, so that we follow his injunction to ‘learn from me’ (Matthew 11:29). Finally, and most important of all, by *communicating with Christ and the whole Church at the Liturgy*, by *taking into ourselves Christ’s Body and Blood*. Christ set up this way of transforming us into him, of giving us the Holy Spirit. It has an effect on us, beyond what we may think or feel it is doing.

We have emphasized before in this course how essential communion is. Our engine is built to function on the Spirit of Christ. The Church when it celebrates the Liturgy is the fuel-depôt designed to dispense that Spirit, and to refuse to go there regularly for supplies is self-destructive. – No good complaining that the local filling-station is a bit grotty or feeling your car isn't clean enough to go there: since that's the official source of supply, you have no alternative.

The Consequences of Christ within Us

What results can you expect from all this? You will find, bit by bit, that the promise of the prophet Ezekiel is fulfilled: our 'stony heart' will begin to turn into 'a heart of flesh' (Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26). You will be 'Christ-tenderized', Spirit-guided, sensitive to God and to other people. Recognizing that God loves you as you are and will rescue you from anything, you start to respond with gratitude and love – and that love will spill over to loving other people. And so you discover the truth of Christ's saying that all moral behaviour, all holiness and goodness, boil down to two requirements: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets' (Matthew 22:37-40).

We sometimes miss one part of what Christ is saying there. You are to 'love your neighbour *as yourself*'. To be able to love other people you have first to love yourself. There is no room in Christianity for devaluing or hating oneself. Sometimes you may need to say to yourself 'Who are *you*, anyway, to rubbish someone that God created and Christ thought worth dying for?' We are commanded to give to everyone else the same interest, attention, value and importance as we give to ourselves and our own concerns – and getting even near that balance of caring for God, self, *and* other people equally will be a lifetime's work.

What Does this Mean for Our Behaviour?

It's all very well, you might say, talking about 'love of God' and 'love of one's neighbour' – but what does it *mean* in real life? How do I decide the moral issues that confront me every hour of my day?

I am not going to make the mistake that many zealous Christians make: I'm not going to make you a new Book of Rules, selected from bits of Old Testament Law that happen to suit me, together with some sayings of Jesus turned into hard-and-fast rules. The Orthodox Christian way to holiness is by acquiring the mind of Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So I am going to take three areas of human concern – sexual relations, work, and possessions – and ask in each case 'What would the mind of Christ lead us to think and do?'

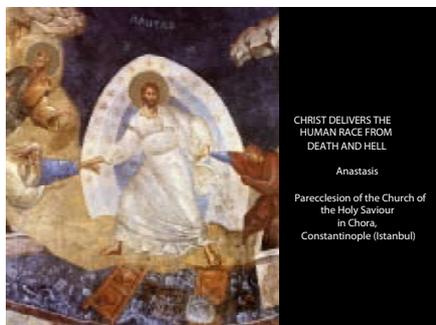
But before we even touch on these questions of practical behaviour, let's get one thing straight. This is something for *you*. You may use it to guide others, as Christians use the wisdom and experience of the 'Body of Christ' – all those Christ-minded people over the centuries, who together make up Christ's Church – to declare God's will for human society. But what you must never do is to use your understanding of what Christ is calling you to do as a stick with which to beat others. You are not to 'judge' them, in the sense of convicting or condemning them (Matthew 7:1-5). Christ tells some of his fiercest parables against those who set themselves up as better than their neighbours, or who, fully knowing they have been forgiven by God, still refuse to forgive other people (Matthew 18:23-35).

Sexual Relations

Christianity is what is known as ‘a revealed religion’. That is to say, we believe certain truths have been communicated to human beings by God – truths that we might well not have thought of, if we had been left to our own devices. We believe that the Bible in its Old and New Testaments contains this revelation. In the matter of sexual relations, we believe that the Book of Genesis, the ‘Book of Beginnings’, indicates why God created sexuality and how it should be used. We also believe that Jesus Christ in the New Testament endorsed this understanding.

The Book of Genesis tells how God created Man ‘in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them’ (Genesis 1:27). In other words, sexual difference, male and female, was there from the beginning, and man and woman are made to go together and together equally they make up Man – the human race. That unity is signified and created by them coming together in sexual intercourse. This Old Testament revelation is repeated by Jesus when he is asked about marriage and divorce: ‘... from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female.” “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ([Genesis 2:24]) So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined, let not man put asunder’ (Mark 10:5-9; Matthew 19:4-5).

Sex was there to make and maintain a permanent bond between a man and a woman: a marriage. Note that marriage was in paradise, part of the ideal state before the Fall. But it is now part of a corrupted world, and if marriage is to be returned to its original state, it needs the redeeming power of Christ. That is one of the many meanings of this wonderful fresco.



Visual Aid 7:

Fresco of the Anastasis or ‘The Harrowing of Hell’

This is an image of the crucified but victorious Christ, who after his death has descended to break down the gates of Hell and release all those who died before his time and were held prisoner by the evil one. First to be released are the Father and Mother of the race, Adam and Eve. In some versions Adam and Eve come from different sides of the picture – a division which signifies the disunity in their married state. But Christ is, literally, yanking them together as he draws them out from sin and death. Christ restores the three-fold relationship of marriage: a triple bond between man and woman and God, who holds them all together in a trinity of love.

The Western Churches teach that marriage is a sacred contract, but *made by the couple* when they give their promises to one another. In a western marriage service these vows made by the couple to each other legally constitute their marriage. An Orthodox marriage does not have vows, so in the law’s eyes it is not a legal contract – that is why we have a civil

ceremony also, so the State can recognize the union as binding. In Orthodox marriage the sacrament is celebrated by the *priest*, representing Christ, who marries the couple to one another: *he* performs the sacrament. In Christ's name he restores a unity that has been lost, healing our sinfulness and our broken relationships, recreating true marriage.

Because of the understanding that has been revealed to it, the Church has necessarily to declare that promiscuous sex ('sleeping around') is contrary to God's intention, because Christ's saying makes clear that the bond between man and woman, one to one, is exclusive and for life. Sex is a major means by which two individuals are bonded into 'one flesh'. (I'd add, as a matter of personal observation, that the attempt to break off a sexual relationship and form another is tearing away part of oneself – it is like undergoing major surgery.)

Similarly, the Orthodox Church is bound to oppose homosexual actions – physical sexual relations between people of the same sex – because the scriptures make crystal-clear that the marriage-bond was designed to be between two different yet complementary partners, a man and a woman. Leviticus 18:22, rather savagely calls male homosexuality 'an abomination', (detestable) – a perversion of God-designed behaviour grouped there with perversions such as a woman having sexual relations with an animal, which is condemned in the next verse. The attempt to make 'one flesh' physically of people of the same sex or between a human and an animal is therefore doomed to failure, to a grotesque, unhealthy parody of sexual activity as God designed it. The Orthodox view is that homosexual acts fall short of God's intention for us and are part of the general sinfulness of unredeemed human nature; but they are not given the special attention accorded them by some western moralists.

Note that there is nothing in all this to forbid love, even intense love, between persons of the same sex. King David in the Old Testament praises his friend Jonathan '([whose]) love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women' (2 Samuel 1:26). Married or unmarried, we are called to love other people, and we need, for our health and for our sense of our own value, to be loved by them. We can't have enough of love.⁴

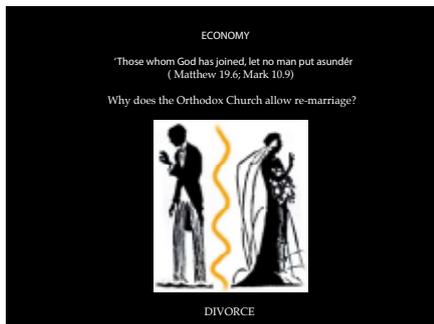
What are we to say about pre-marital sex: sexual relations between a couple who are intending to marry? They are fulfilling God's intention that we be bonded together into 'one flesh'. But because we are fallen human beings, we need the Christian sacrament of marriage to restore our sexual relationship to what it should be. To embark on being 'one flesh' without first asking for Christ's action to put us to rights is unnecessary risk-taking – putting it bluntly, it's *foolish*.

As for 'trial-marriages', so called – trying it out to see if it works or suits – that involves both selfishness and a lack of faith. The lack of faith is in the power of Christ to form a marriage that will last, and a lack of faith in the ability of yourself and your partner to make a lasting commitment. The selfishness comes in being prepared, if the relationship doesn't work out, to dump a partner who might be totally devoted to you. As with other ruptures in human relationships, there are almost always casualties and damage.

The Practice of 'Economy'

In interpreting the great moral principles revealed by the Christian faith, a priest when he gives advice, and a bishop when he exercises his authority, will use a considerable measure of what is called *economia*, 'economy'.⁵ This 'economy' is from the Greek *oikonomia*, what

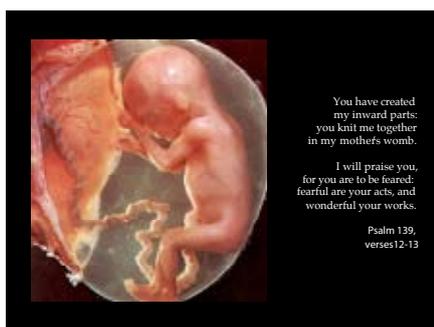
Dumitru Staniloae (the great Romanian theologian) describes as the energy of God, making us aware of him, making us more fully aware of ourselves, and ‘tenderizing’ us toward our fellow human beings. Metropolitan Kallistos defines ‘economy’ in operation as ‘pastoral flexibility according to the particular situation of each person’. Putting it more simply, it is love of God and love of people, before rules.



Visual Aid 8: Divorce

The principle of ‘economy’ explains why the Orthodox Church’s attitude to divorce and re-marriage sometimes seems to other Christians a bit lax. It seems to directly contradict Christ’s command that man should not put asunder what God has joined. The Orthodox Church emphasizes, with Christ, that marriage is for life. But it also acknowledges, as Christ does, that this world is fallen, corrupted by the powers of evil. Human beings suffer accidents, disasters and the effects of wrongdoing – often not of their own making. Marriages break down, prove unworkable, or are contrary to the well-being of the partners. Married couples can reject the redemptive grace of Christ offered in the sacrament of marriage. For this reason – that the Church conveys Christ’s understanding and forgiveness to a broken world – the Orthodox allow divorce and re-marriage – though the rite for a second or third marriage is more penitential than celebratory. Even then, Metropolitan Kallistos tells me that in practice the penitential rite for re-marriage is rarely used.

The Sanctity of Human Life



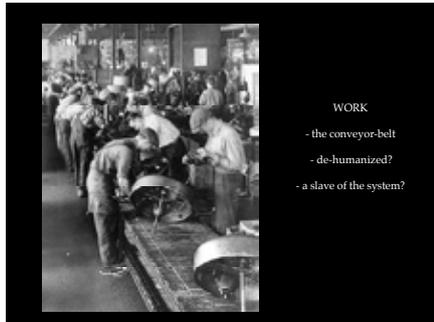
Visual Aid 9: The Unborn Child

A major principle witnessed by the Orthodox Church in common with the other Christian Churches is the sanctity of human life. Every human existence is created by God and belongs to Him. To kill another human being is murder, and the Orthodox Church recognizes that this is an evil, whatever the circumstances.⁶ We do not condone suicide or euthanasia, because our lives are not our own, to terminate them when we see fit. Still less are we at liberty to kill children yet unborn or children shortly after birth. To do so is sacrilege, the violation of something holy, something that is a potential dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. The early Fathers and the Church as a whole from its beginnings, in all

places and at all times, held to the principle that abortion and infanticide are murder, the snuffing out of a sacred life that belongs to God. Because the practice of abortion has been widespread in ancient and modern societies, the Church's stand has been both courageous and unpopular.

The Church's opposition to abortion is crystal-clear, and Britain in common with many Western societies stands under the judgement of God for the wholesale slaughter of unborn babies: in 1999 just short of 174,000 abortions were performed in England and Wales.

Work



Visual Aid 10: *Work*

In the matter of work, we are going to need a large measure of 'economia'. Work now is often something we do just to survive, a drudgery that serves chiefly to feed ourselves and our loved ones. Yet work was in Paradise according to the Book of Genesis and it was pleasurable. It gave human beings the joy of appreciating, sharing in and cooperating in God's creativity – as any good gardener knows. Work was once something you did as a love-gesture for your fellow human beings – as when a mother bakes a cake for her family. But we are often, in modern society, at a great distance from those who are supposed to benefit from our work: work no longer feels like something we do to help others and be appreciated by them. The story is told of how a strange little creature walked into the Ministry of Education in London, and the bureaucrats gathered round, trying to puzzle out what it was. Finally someone, greatly daring, said 'I *think* it's a *child*'.

Distance may also disguise from us the evil our work causes: only now are people becoming aware that low prices in the coffee or chocolate trades are built on poor conditions and even slave labour in the Third World. Some of these things we can influence: we can buy our coffee or our chocolate from Fair Trade organizations who keep an eye on the work-conditions of their suppliers. But because the Western Churches have largely failed to bring Christ to bear on ruthless commercial competition and the harshness of the 'market economy', the bulk of workers are required at times to do things that they feel or know to be wrong.

Not everyone can move into professions or jobs that seem to make it less difficult to be a Christian – you are fortunate if you can be a doctor or nurse, a professor or a teacher – though I'd say from hard experience that even there temptations assail you. If you *can* make a job-shift, you probably should. If your muscles brought you to be a bouncer at a gambling saloon or a strip-club, or a bailiff or a debt-collector, maybe you *would* be better off digging the roads (as the saying is). If enough people made that choice, it would become impossibly expensive to engage bouncers to deal with rowdies, bailiffs to seize people's possessions, so that casinos and strip-clubs would have to close, and debt collection agencies find more humane ways of

getting back what is owed. But the fact remains that the corrupt nature of the world means that most if not all of us who work in it have at times to get our hands dirty.

We need, therefore, the Liturgy's constantly repeated prayer: *'Lord, have mercy'*. And in dealing with ourselves and in accepting guidance from other Christians, we will need a degree of *'economia'* – of tempering the absolute principles of Christian behaviour (love of God and love of others) to the realities of our actual situation. We will need the mind of Christ to tell us (in the terms of the popular prayer) those things we can change, and those things we cannot change. Above all, we will need to remember that we are, as Christians, servants of a king whose rule is not acknowledged by the corrupt powers that govern this world. The revolution has begun but is not yet finished that will transform the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God and his Christ. So you are like partisans in occupied territory: you don't sacrifice your life or your livelihood at every opportunity, but you wait till you are called to make a stand, to strike for truth where it will really make an impact. An accountant who queries every personal expense the boss tries to swing on to the company will never rise to a position where he can expose the company for fraudulent accounts. But to know when and when not to make a stand, you have to keep tuned in to High Command: prayer is the radio through which your instructions will come.

Possessions

Last of all, and briefly, I want to talk about the product of our work: money and possessions and the power they give. If you are a Christian, you are called (as at baptism) to 'turn to Christ' and to keep turning to Christ. Don't let me disguise from you the reality of what that means. Conversion to Christ means also conversion of the wallet. The Christ we have talked so much about will not allow you to call anything your own: sooner or later he will make it clear that you have given him a right to all that you are and all that you possess. Anything you have is what Christ has given back, permitted you to use. And for all that he has given or returned, he will expect an account. Did you use it for his purposes?



Visual Aid 12: *Hanging on to what one has*

That is a crunch-point for many people. The Jews established a principle of tithing: one tenth of what you have is for God, the rest is your own. Many of the Protestant churches follow this rule of a tenth for the Church, and that is why their churches have funds for so many good works, in education, health care, social service and the like. If we Orthodox began to imitate them, there is so much we could do.

I say it's a crunch-point, because the thought of turning everything over to Christ terrifies us. We want security: I will only feel secure when the mortgage is paid off, the house mine, and there's also that little bit in the bank that no one can touch but me, just for any

emergency. But (as I once heard the former Anglican Bishop of Salisbury, Joe Fison, say) keeping a little hidden away in reserve is a major cause of faith going dead. He said that when people came to him complaining that Christ, God, religion were starting to mean less and less to them, he almost always found it was a case of 'lumber in the attic': areas of one's life, of one's concerns or activities or possessions that you weren't prepared to let Jesus Christ get his hands on. 'Keep off, Jesus – that bit's for *me*'.

Christ demands your all – and giving your all to Christ is the essence of Christian behaviour.



Visual Aid 12: Self-offering

The rewards are far more than we can imagine: a life cleansed and fulfilled, because we are being turned into the likeness of God in Christ.

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- 1 A mention needs to be made of the role much valued in the Orthodox Church, that of the 'spiritual father' as a source of guidance and advice. When it functions at its best, you may see the 'spiritual father' as an assistant in the workshop, an apprentice to Christ, who as a fellow-member of the Body of Christ aids those who seek to know the mind of Christ for themselves. Nevertheless, many 'spiritual fathers' will turn aside requests to 'Tell me what to do'. They and their charges are sensitive to the danger of ignoring Christ's injunction to his followers in Matthew 23:8-10: 'But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ.' Take those sayings according to the letter and you would cease to call one of your parents 'father' and there would be no more 'Masters of Arts' or 'Masters of Science'. Take it in the spirit it is meant, and you will not refuse 'fatherly' advice from fellow-Christians but will be aware that it is to Christ, not to them, that we will all have to answer.
- 2 Worse still, even the best of moral codes – even the Old Testament Law – are a funny mix: part God-inspired, part human custom. Most moderns are offending against the Jewish Law by wearing clothes that are, for instance, a wool-and-polyester mix. Leviticus 19:19 says you must not wear a 'garment of cloth made of two kinds of stuff'. And in Deuteronomy 22:11 we read, 'You shall not wear a mingled stuff, wool and linen together'. The difficulty is greater because our God-given consciences are warped by our upbringing, and we are not very good at sorting out God's demands from the requirements inculcated by parents, teachers and society as a whole. My own family were great ones for table-manners. They made such a fuss about them that for many years I felt almost as bad if I turned over my fork and spooned up my peas with it as I would if I had hit someone in a fit of anger!
- 3 See note 1 above on the role of the 'spiritual father'.

- 4 If Orthodox bishops are forbidden to marry, that is not because married love with a woman is a weakness. A bishop is required to have more love, to spread his love over all those people entrusted to his care. To remain unmarried is a personal sacrifice made for a greater good – and it is a sacrifice made by many others, who resolve for a greater purpose not to take on close family commitments.
- 5 Metropolitan Kallistos Ware comments that the sometimes severe rules and penalties in the ancient canons of the Church are now often dispensed with: ‘Today it would be altogether exceptional for the canons to be enforced in their full rigor; a broad measure of “economy” is normal.’ (*The Inner Kingdom*, p.52, in *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press: New York, 2000)).
- 6 We do not make a soldier a priest, because a soldier may be required to kill. (However, the Church does not condemn soldiering, any more than Christ did; and many ex-soldiers have become priests.)