

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Last month, on May 29th I turned 40. I suppose it was rather appropriate that Ascension Day, which is always 40 days after Easter, fell on that particular day. For as our Lord ascended up into the heavens after 40 days, so my age "went up" to 40 on the same day. A friend of mine told me to beware of reaching this milestone, as all of his own personal health problems began when he reached that. Sharing this bit of wisdom with another person - I forget whom - I was told, "No, your health doesn't begin to decline when you turn 40... it starts when you turn 50!" Somehow I do not find either observation very comforting. Well since we cannot stop the aging process I suppose the best thing to do is just embrace it and try to grow old gracefully. Whenever I start worrying about the increasing number gray hairs on my head or the like I will just go get a senior's breakfast at Denny's and then come home and watch the Weather Channel! All kidding aside, birthdays are a great opportunity to reflect on God and his love and goodness to us. In a world of constant flux we may rest assured that God never changes. According to the scriptures Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. While our *experience* of God changes as *we* change - by becoming more spiritually mature, by living through the joys and difficulties of life, etc. - God himself *never* changes. By way of example, just as the Prayer of Consecration in the sacred liturgy of the Church never changes, the way I *experience* it has changed over the years - especially now that I am a priest who reads that prayer. The way I look at it, think about it and approach has changed even since I have been ordained! But again, the prayer itself has not changed. So God never changes, but the way that we approach him in the course of life does. Regardless of how life changes for us - or changes us - we may take comfort in the eternal changelessness of God, and therefore place our lives in his hands, trust in him, and rely upon to meet all of our needs. We may lose faith in God because of some tragedy, but God is faithful and never abandons us. We may cease to love or seek his face in prayer and worship, but he never fails to love his children or seek them out through the power of the Holy Spirit, calling them to repentance and faith. In living the Christian life it is important therefore that we frame our daily lives and approach to God in terms of his changelessness, and *not* according to whatever whims we may "feel" about him or life at the moment. We cannot always trust our feelings precisely because they are constantly changing, but we can trust in God and his promises because he is good, holy, and never changes. That is certainly good news in a world where everything is always changing and uncertain. May God bless St. Alban's Church as we worship and adore his matchless name, and try to lead others to faith in his Son!

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

June 9th - 10th - Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun Week

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

June 11th, 13th, 14th - Ember Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

June 18th - St. Barnabas

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

June 24th - St. John Baptist

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

July 4th - Independence Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

July 25th - St. James

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

August 6th - Transfiguration

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

September 17th, 19th, 20th - Ember Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

October 18th - St. Luke

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY: *The "One and the Many" and the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity*

This month on Sunday, June 15th we celebrate the feast of the Holy Trinity. In a nutshell, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is that God is a community of three persons who share in one divine substance. Alluded to throughout the pages of scripture, and finally articulated by the Church in the ancient ecumenical councils, we confess our belief in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity each time we say the Nicene Creed. We also sing about it in such great hymns as #266 in the Hymnal: *"Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty! All thy works shall praise thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea; Holy! Holy! Holy! Merciful and mighty, God in three Persons, blessed Trinity"* (Hymnal 266)

Most of us find the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to be rather confusing to think about. This is to be expected since it is a *mystery*. Whenever we delve into the Being of God, and try to learn more about his holy and divine nature, we cannot help but be stumped and lost much of the time... for we are looking into the greatest mystery known to man.

Because of this we may not see the point in trying to learn *anything* about God. Why waste time reflecting on abstruse mysteries like the doctrine of the Holy Trinity? It requires too much effort, and yields little in the way of results. It is easiest to live in "blissful ignorance."

Well we might be surprised to learn that ancient Greek, pre-Socratic philosophers (philosophers who lived before Socrates) found it very worthwhile to explore a similar question known as "the problem of the one and many." Perhaps since the ancient Greeks did not balk at exploring such questions, we shouldn't either!

According to the famed historian of philosophy, Frederick Copleston, the problem of the one and the many

was originally a cosmological problem. That is to say, it is a question about the nature of the universe. Early philosophers such as Thales and Heraclitus looked at the world around them and came to the conclusion that there must be an underlying unity to all things. Some of these folk speculated that stuff such as air, water, or fire were the ultimate principle and underlying stratum of all things.

But despite their interest in finding a *unity* in the cosmos, and their speculation that there was indeed an ultimate principle behind all things, these philosophers were faced with fact of *diversity*. How to reconcile these two - the unity and diversity - or, changelessness and change, became a very important important intellectual pastime. Yet despite their best efforts they were never able to solve the mysterious problem of the one and the many.

However, far from being a waste of time, or hopeless naval-gazing, the philosophical speculation of the Greeks in this area uncovered an important dynamic or tension that we find in almost every other area of human life and history.

It is especially evident in family life. The one and the many, unity and diversity, is evident in the matrimonial bond between man and wife. Though a husband and his wife indeed become one flesh in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, yet at the same time they are still two different people. A family consists of many members, but it is still one body. Indeed, all around us we seem to discern this reality and dynamic tension between the one and the many, as though it is imprinted on the universe. Why is that?

The answer is because of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity! As the Calvinist political philosopher and theologian, R.J. Rushdoony, wrote years ago, it all goes back to creation. God created the heavens and the

earth, and all that therein is. And the pinnacle of his creation is man, whom, as we read in Genesis, he made in his image and likeness as male and female. Because God created all things, the universe bears his divine image, which is Trinitarian... unity in diversity. And because man is made in the very image and likeness of God, what we create - such as political systems - naturally have the character of unity and diversity. Rushdoony draws some practical conclusions from this thesis, *"Since both the one and the many are equally ultimate in God it immediately becomes apparent that these two seemingly contradictory aspects of being do not cancel each other out but are equally basic to the ontological Trinity, one God, three Persons. Again, since temporal unity and plurality are the products and creation of this Triune God neither the unity nor the plurality can demand the sacrifice of the other for itself."* (Rushdoony, "The One and the Many", 1971)

Thus, reflecting on the mystery of unity-in-diversity in these various areas of life (the cosmos, the family, etc.), while it certainly does not provide us with an "olympian" knowledge of all of reality, it does in fact enrich our thinking and living in manifold ways. Likewise, reflecting on the Being of God, especially his Triune Nature, while certainly not providing us with an all-encompassing knowledge of him, does a lot to reveal his character to us and draw us closer to him. The added benefit of reflecting on God in this way is that since he created the us and the world, learning more about him will shed light on us and our existence. Conversely, studying and reflecting on the created world helps us apprehend God, its maker and sustainer.

Can all of this be overwhelming and confusing at times? Yes. Will learn the answers to all of our questions and the big secrets of life? Absolutely not. Is it worthwhile. Absolutely *yes!* ✠

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: *Some Memories from a Christian School*

This past January I learned with great sadness that the Christian high school I attended closed due to lack of enrollment. This place, and the dedicated teachers and administrators who worked therein, had a profound influence on my life for the good. My relationship with God was greatly deepened by attending this school, and it was there that the seeds of my later priestly vocation were first planted and nurtured.

My parents got the idea of sending me to a private school when my grades began to fall in middle school. I remember being puzzled at the time as to whether or not this would be a solution to my apparent lack of interest in learning, but since I was always up for an adventure, I went along with their plan. A good friend attended a small, little-known school called Grace Bible Baptist Christian School in the Woodlawn/Catonsville area of Baltimore county. After our moms spoke on the phone about the school, my mother scheduled a meeting with the school's founder and principal, Pastor Johnson, who was also the founding pastor of Grace Bible Baptist Church. I remember quite vividly sitting in the lobby of the school building with mother waiting for this man to come out and greet us. Inasmuch as the only Baptists I had ever met in my life were African-American, I naturally assumed that Pastor Johnson was black. For some reason I also thought he would be enormously fat. Well you can imagine my surprise when a short, trim, and extremely old-looking white guy with a booming voice and bald head energetically shot out of his office and welcomed us to the school. The meeting went very well, as he described the school's philosophy and approach. So mom asked when I could begin. "How about tomorrow?" He said. I couldn't believe my ears. This was a man who clearly had no time for waiting and games; he just got things done. So, bidding a fond farewell to all of my friends with whom I'd grown up, and to Deer Park Middle School, I transferred to Grace, and found myself, like Joseph in the book of Genesis, "a stranger in a strange land." (Albeit with a uniform and navy tie)

There wasn't much difference between "Grace" as we called it versus Deer Park (or "Queer Park" as we called it). All of the same subjects were taught, except that at Grace we had a daily "Bible" class and a weekly chapel service. The facilities were of course much more modest than public school facilities. Classes were held in a converted (no pun intended) church building that showed its age, despite how much they tried to gussy it up. Most of the male teachers were ordained clergy who got roped into teaching courses they often knew little about. The female teachers were usually clergy wives, and actually had earned degrees in their field. All of them were members of Grace

Bible Baptist Church, presided over by the loving, domineering, and driven Pastor Johnson. My dad would later memorably describe the school as a "screwball operation." In a way he was right, but from the inside it all made perfect sense.

The biggest culture shock I had at Grace was being exposed to the world of "fundamentalist" Christianity. In this world everything is black and white. The key to surviving it, and reaping its benefits - and it does offer benefits - is knowing how to take the serious parts seriously, and the not-so-serious parts not seriously. The leadership at Grace consumed untold amounts of energy on a lot of the not-so-serious stuff. For example, I was told among other things that drinking, smoking, playing cards, being a Freemason, dancing, and physical contact with members of the opposite sex outside of marriage was sinful. Much of this was strange to me, especially the bit about alcohol. Coming as I did from a home where my parents, both extremely devout, enjoyed a glass of wine every night, I just did not buy their fantastical arguments as to why the beverage use of alcohol was morally wrong. Drunkenness? Of course. But a glass of red wine with some cheese and crackers? I don't think so.

One of the greatest sins that could be committed at our young age was listening to rock music. Week after week, and year after year, Pastor Johnson and other faculty members would lecture us on the evils of rock and roll. There was no difference in their minds between listening to Air Supply or Black Sabbath... it was *all* evil, because it could lead your soul astray, mainly by inciting one to commit a host of other sins (recreational drugs, dancing, and of course sexual sin, etc.). Pastor Johnson always claimed to have uncovered some new secret connection between a leading rock band and the devil. Brief examples: AC/DC stood for "Against Christ, Devil's Child", while KISS stood for "Knights in Satan's Service." And on and on. The only musical sin one could commit that was greater than listening to rock music was listening to so-called *Christian* rock music. If *anything* had the potential to send your soul into the fiery pit of hell it was this, because these people claimed to be Christians, and yet they were playing the devil's music! Again, there was no distinction between the different groups: Sandy Patti was just as bad as Stryper. And God have mercy on your soul if you had an Amy Grant record... the brazen little hussy (also divorced) who once dared sing a duet with Peter Cetera! About once a semester Grace would have a concentrated campaign against all things rock music-related at the school. An evangelist would be invited to school to preach for a week on various topics - most especially the evils of rock music. He would then issue an "altar call" inviting everyone who wanted to please God to come forward (*cont'd next page*)

and make a pledge to God to stop listening to rock music. Of course, if you were listening to rock music there was a good chance that you were not a real Christian to begin with, so first you had to get truly “saved” and *then* you could deal with the sinful habit of listening to rock music. Those who did not come forward to get saved and stop listening to rock music were sometimes loudly mocked and ridiculed by the evangelists before being cast out of the room. In the words of Alice Cooper it was, “No more mister nice guy.” These theatrical shows inevitably culminated in a huge bonfire on school grounds where these newly committed Christians could burn all of their records, tapes, posters, and rock tee-shirts! Yes, you read that correctly... a literal, burning bonfire was started and zealous kids, anxious to please God, would hurl their items into the fire. It was amazing to watch. But no sooner did the evangelists leave town, and the apocalyptic furor died down, did those who burned up their stuff wail and lament at what they had done! Now they’d have to buy everything all over again!! Oh the memories...

Yet despite having to put up with strange beliefs regarding rock music, dancing, cards, alcohol, and similar matters, I count it a blessing and a privilege to have attended that school. The people who ran Grace really truly and sincerely loved God. They had a passionate and incredible interest in changing the world by leading people to Jesus Christ. At Grace you could really get to know your teachers, and they you. They would work with you, and encourage you, and try to mentor you. I will never forget the first time one of my teachers, a guy by the name of Phil Zilinski, asked me point blank if I had ever thought about going into the ministry someday. Over the course of a few years he had discerned in me certain gifts that might be useful for the kingdom of God, and he took the time to mention it to me and encourage me to think about it.

Because the faculty and staff loved and cared for the students so much, we students really took a sense of ownership of the place, and we realized that we were part of a family. Every single thing that we did at the school was to further the ministry of the Gospel and the Kingdom of Heaven. Once in a while there would be a disaster. One day, a water heater in the church broke, and water started flooding the church. There were we in some fifth period class when John Gorham, vice principal and son-in-law of Pastor Johnson, burst into the room shouting, “We need all of the men over in the church right now!!” We closed our books and ran over, taking off our shoes and socks, and began helping clean up the mess. Another day we were asked to help lay some sod on church/school grounds. Other times we’d find ourselves leaving class early so we could go help widow of church clear her yard of debris. When I got my driver’s license and was given a truck to drive I was occasionally asked during study hall period to haul items to the dump for the

church and school. That we did all of this stuff and more shows the sense of love and ownership we had of the place, which love and ownership was instilled in us by the faculty and staff. Because they loved us, we loved them.

At Grace *everyone* mattered, and everyone was part of the family. To this day I am amazed at how many lives God changed through the ministry of the church and the school. The church would take a bus into the worst parts of the city on Sunday mornings and collect kids for Sunday school and church. Most of these kids came from severally broken homes, and had all sorts of problems. But through the ministry many of them came to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Some even enrolled in the school, and when they could not afford it, or their parents did not support them, or even care about them, were allowed to move in with the faculty and their families. A number of these folk went on to become college graduates and eventually ministers themselves who are now working the in very communities whence they came, also now leading people to Jesus.

Despite the stern exterior of the place, and the strict rules, Grace was lots of fun, and the faculty and staff were really wonderful and delightful human beings. Once, Pastor Johnson himself caught me and another student smoking cigarettes out behind the church dumpster... a major offense to say the least! But he let us off with just a warning and never said a word about it to anyone! Another time, I brazenly skipped school to go take my driver’s test. When I passed and got my license I decided to drive to school and show everyone my car. I went into the church to find everyone and there they were sitting in some sort of chapel service. All of a sudden from behind John Gorham grabbed me by my hair, pulled my head back (gently) and said menacingly, “Okay hippie, where were you today?” I told him and he let go and said with a huge smile on his face, “All right! Let’s go check out your car!” And we went out so I could proudly show off my 1978 Ford Granada (my first car). Another time, in the middle of a long, boring class, Pastor Johnson barreled into the room and said, “Everyone up! I’m taking the whole school to McDonald’s!” Yay! Go pastor!

That was the cool kind of place Grace was. God mattered most, and the people made in his image and likeness. It was a homegrown effort, and monument to what God can do by the power of his Holy Spirit in the hearts of his faithful people. The low enrollment was due to the fact that Pastor Johnson refused to advertise the school outside of the church. People who didn’t go to the church found out about like I did, by word of mouth. Pastor was too authentic to worry about “advertising.” Everything had to be led by the Holy Spirit, and I suppose the Spirit decided that Grace’s time had come. The church lives on, however, as do the many lessons, spiritual and otherwise, I learned while attending their school. ✕