



## ANNUAL DEANERY CONFERENCE 2011 27TH. - 30TH MAY, 2011

ALL SAINTS PASTORAL CENTRE, LONDON COLNEY, ST. ALBANS

*"THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, WITH ALL THY SOUL AND WITH ALL THY MIND . . . AND THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF"*



The Annual Congress of the Deanery of Great Britain took place as usual in the beautiful manor of All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney, St Albans near London from Friday 27th May to Monday 30th May.

Around 150 participants, coming from different parishes of the Deanery gathered around our Archbishop Gabriel, who opened the conference with a discussion on love in the community. His Eminence, who speaks good English, shared very simply his personal preoccupations, and thanked the faithful for their support. Next there was the service of evening prayers followed by free time in the bar.

Saturday was reserved for presentations based on the general theme: "Love of God, Our Neighbour and Ourselves". The first presentation was given by Fr David Gill: God's love for us: incarnate love of Christ. The second presentation, by Mary Cunningham, was about intimate love in friendship and marriage. There were discussion groups and workshops at the end of the afternoon. The Vigil was celebrated after dinner, followed by confessions in the church in the centre.

On Sunday the pontifical liturgy was celebrated by Archbishop Gabriel, with about twenty priests. The singing in English was magnificent. After the "continental" breakfast there would have been a talk by Fr Michael Evdokimov but he was detained in France because his wife had an accident. Therefore his talk "St Seraphim of Sarov and St Francis of Assisi: the response of the saints to God's love," was read by an English friend. His Eminence put forward the question of the stigma of St Francis, an unknown phenomena in Eastern spirituality. This could be the subject of a study and of deeper reflection. An entertaining evening with singing and dancing, and a buffet, ended the day.

Monday, the last day, was the concluding day, with a talk by Mary An de Trana on Godly self love and Godly self care, then there was a round table on the Community as an organism of Love.

It must be added that the atmosphere was very warm and brotherly, witnessing a remarkable orthodox awareness. The quality of comfort and the welcome in the house as well as the excellent cuisine in the refectory also contributed greatly to the success of the event.

Fr Vladimir Yagello

While the adults gathered in the main hall to discuss and reflect on love, the theme of this year's conference, a small group of children gathered on the other side of the quadrangle for their own fun weekend of games and activities. Drawing and painting was interspersed with a vigorous table tennis tournament, whilst the beautiful grounds of the pastoral centre afforded some lovely walks, a little house with some cuddly guinea pigs and a couple of very energetic games of football, the last of which some unlucky grownups finally losing 10-9 to the determined kids (anyone for a rematch next year?). Also on Sunday afternoon an excursion to St. Albans cathedral got underway which allowed everyone to explore this beautiful local place of worship but also to learn about Saint Alban himself who had given his name to the cathedral, the town and our home for the weekend. It was not all fun and games however as three small talks from visiting priests enabled the children to become involved in their own way with the theme of the conference. Father Alexander approached the idea of love head on and what it might mean to us while Father Timothy discussed how this might relate to our normal human behaviour, both good and naughty, and Father Stephan approached the theme via the story of Jonah and the whale. This last talk provided the inspiration for the final presentation made before all the grownups of Sunday evening, which saw the children acting out the story with no set and minimal props but great energy, charm and humour, impressing everyone and ultimately bringing to a close what had been both a fun and interesting weekend in St. Albans.



Father David Gill



Mary Cunningham



Jeanne Knights



Father David Gill spoke of God's love for us. He noted the great change initiated by our Lord Jesus Christ: « I will walk among you as your God ( Lev 26:12), of the old dispensation, becomes « We will make our abode with you» - in LOVE (John 14:23). This outpouring of love and the establishment of a new and intimate loving relationship is key. We know God loves us and we are to love him and call him « Abba, Father».

Some Fathers have referred to the erotic love of God. When we are in love we want desperately all that the other will give and we want to give to the other all that we have. In the same way God's love for each of us is unique between him and us, a mutual giving and a transformation into something which else could never be. The Bishop of London as the recent Royal wedding ( in UK ) said Love brings transformation «as husband and wife make one another their work of art! « We are all God's work of art.

The Elder Porphyrios in the book about him, appropriately entitled, Wounded by Love , describes how being in love enables you to live amidst the hustle and bustle of the city centre and not be aware that you are in the city centre. « You see neither cars, nor people, nor anything. Within yourself you are with the person you love. You experience her, you take delight in her, she inspires you.» The Elder says: «imagine that the person you love is Christ, Christ is in your mind, Christ in your heart , Christ in your whole being, the source of love, the source of life.» This is how we should live. This is the core of the Gospel.

Further David spoke of Christ's sacrifice on the cross which was entirely based on Love. He desired to experience everything that human beings experience: birth, life, suffering, death, and the descent into Hades because He wished to prevent the whole world from perishing in sin. This was His sacrifice but it was a sacrifice of

love. It was love to the end. He would not accept anything, any alternative path which would diminish God's Love.

When our Lord Jesus Christ had completed His work and was again sitting at the right hand of God, then

the Father began His work at Pentecost, when His Spirit was poured out. This was an act of outpouring love. It is described by Matthew the Poor in his book "The Communion of Love». He says that the first impression on our minds and hearts, on the great day of Pentecost, should be the awareness of the affection of the Father towards us, a feeling of fatherly and fiery love poured out on humanity. We find God not in the spectacular but in the «sound of a gentle breeze» as experienced by Elijah (1 Kings 19:12). The fruits of the Spirit, writes St Paul, are: « love , joy, peace, kindness, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control» (Galatians 5:22].

Finally, Fr David reminded us of the love that shines through God's saints, noting the comment made by Archimandrite Vasileios of Mount Athos in his book « The Hymn of Entry»: "As we draw near to a saint we feel that he loves us. Beside him we feel spaciousness, infinity, warmth. The Orthodox saint has worth, not on account of his virtue, but because he is Christ himself , 'in another form'. He shares the same glory and splendour.«

When someone is embraced by the Love of God, they are transformed. We see this in the great saints and in quite lowly people and even in ourselves. We too are called to respond to a God who is extravagantly loving. We are called to be like Him, to know Him as our Father, and to become godlike. God is already at work within each one of us. We have to ensure that all that hinders and all that blocks His love within us, is removed, so that we can indeed be transformed and become God's work of art.



Arch Gabriel

# AN ORTHODOX APPROACH TO BIOETHICAL LAWS

9th Symposium of the Association of Orthodox Bio-ethical Studies (May 21st, 2011)

On Saturday, May 21st the 9th Symposium of the Association of Orthodox Bio-ethical Studies was held in the St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute (Paris-France). It was dedicated to the Orthodoxy of bioethical laws, which are currently in their 2nd reading in Parliament, and leave a certain anxiety for the future. The speakers were the deputy Jean Bardet, Jérémie Ceausescu, professor to Saint Sergius, and Father Jean Boboc. Fr Nicolas Cernokrak received on behalf Saint Serge some participants who are very involved in these issues, amongst whom was Bishop Michel (Donskoff), whose contribution was very much appreciated. In the absence of Bishop Gabriel, who was detained at the last minute, Deacon Dominique Beauflis gave the introduction, a short summary of which is published below. Please note that this symposium will be broadcast by "Orthodoxy" (France2) on June 12th and July 17th.

The purpose of ethics is to find the ideal link between development of knowledge and respect for fundamental values, differing according to civilizations, philosophies and religions. Can we establish a law which anything other than a compromise trying to unite incompatible values by juridical prowess? They find ways to get around it, calling them «infringements», to protect scientific research rather than essential values. They forget that «good» is what brings us closer to God, and that «evil» is what separates us, because «good» is what they imposed as possible then habitual, the «evil» becoming de facto «good» by the force of usage, and the law which perpetuates it.

They often construct contradictory laws, which they know will be rejected immediately. Can they find an equilibrium which respects the values upon which Orthodoxy is founded while making progress in the fight against disease? Does the

life of human beings justify sacrificing thousand of embryos?

If they think that human life begins from conception, the answer is clear. If they think that there is a stage where the embryo is only a mass of cells, it is also clear, but diametrically opposite. If they grant humanity only on a parental plan, the answer depends on a will ignoring God: The parents give life to a being while being able to take it away from it according to their whim. In these conditions, the law tried to provide for opposites to coexist by allowing infringements and providing boundaries that are as strict as the people responsible for them want them to be.

The fields of law have to limit themselves to therapeutics. Legislating on in vitro conceived embryos before they are implanted, the purpose of which is eugenics which French law condemns, is a legal nonsense. The application of biotechnologies for social comfort, such as the medically assisted procreation for single women or homosexual couples, is for comfort only. To put nanotechnologies in the service of performance or aesthetics is unacceptable.

Ethics, in Orthodoxy, consists of helping people who are suffering, by offering answers on a case by case basis, respecting their freedom, and in a spirit of «economy». However, the approach, even individual, to these questions rests on the teaching of Christ, and has as its first principle respect for life from its beginning – which is, for Orthodoxy, human and unique from conception – to its end, answering the question of euthanasia. Christians have a witnesses' role. We could sum up an orthodox understanding of ethics thus: "Do what I say and what I do comply with the creed which I confess?"

Orthodoxy does not oppose research and progress but, being conscious of the whole question, stressing some alternatives respecting fundamental values, proves to be much more efficient and more promising. It does not come to impose a rigid rule and that cannot be broken. If bioethical laws broadly have recourse to infringements, the «economy», on which Orthodoxy is based, has neither flexibility nor is it as rigid in character, but remains punctual and is based on respect for Christian Values.

## ORDINATIONS

► Archbishop Gabriel :

- Before the holy liturgy celebrated on 2 June, the reader **Alexis Milyutine** was ordained subdeacon. During the holy liturgy he was ordained Deacon. He is attached to the parish of st Serge (Paris)