The consecration of the church of the new community of Saint Martin of Tours took place in Balingen on May 12th, 2012. The church itself dates back to the 15th century and is currently the location for the Orthodox parish. Before the liturgy His Grace Gabriel ordained Thomas Zmija as reader.

Michael Buk, Rector of this new parish, offered his congratulations before approximately 70 faithful, and in the presence of Father Johannes Kassberger, Subdeacon Athanasius and Deacon Alexej Veselov (of the Russian Patriarchat) in order that the Divine Liturgy be cocelebrated.

Also present were Catholic and Evangelical elders as well as the Mayor of Balingen who was happy to make the chapel available.

After the liturgy, the clergy and faithful were invited to share a meal in an adjoining room of the church.

But what brought us here, how did we come to celebrating the Divine Liturgy in this church? For 15 years we have had a small chapel in Aldbstadt (very pretty, of course, but indeed very small) at our disposition. For this reason we had been looking for something larger. In May 2012, we met with Madame Reitemann and Schäfer, of the town hall of Balingen to discuss our desire to use the chapel of Siechen. Our request was considered favourably and we signed the contract allowing us to move in, in October 2011. At this time the basement of the chapel didn’t exist, and we had to renovate. We began repairs in October 2011 with the goal of celebrating the Pascal liturgy. We succeeded to celebrate the first Liturgy on April 1st, thanks to the generous aid of several parishioners. The chapel may seem very simple from an Orthodox point of view, but it is beautiful and we are content to be able to celebrate our services in a true Church that already holds a long and interesting history. We would like to extend our thanks to the city of Balingen, who helped make this possible.

It is also necessary to mention the interest that the population of Balingen took in this chapel, and in our efforts. As soon as the chapel door was opened, people entered wanting to know what was happening. Thank you again to everyone who supported us and who allowed this celebration to take place. Our gratitude extends to His Grace Gabriel as well as the concelebrants of this Divine Liturgy, to the choir, the servers, and everyone who participated.
Sunday, June 17, the parish of the Holy Trinity solemnly celebrated the 90th birthday of Father René Dorenlot. The Divine Liturgy was presided by Archbishop Gabriel. We have reproduced an interview with Father René published in the Bulletin of the Crypte. In it, he speaks about his personal history, how he discovered Orthodoxy, and his commitment to the church. For nearly forty years, Father René served the parish of the Crypt (parish of the Holy Trinity which is in the crypt of the cathedral rue Daru in Paris). By his constant and discreet presence, he is one of the pillars of this community.

In 1964, with the appointment of Father Peter Struve by Archbishop Georges (Tarasov), the community of the Crypt was formed and the celebration of the offices there became regular. The community grew rapidly in number. Attracted by the reputation of the Crypt, many people from different backgrounds were added to the initial core. In 1968, with the tragic death of Father Peter, Bishop George asked Father Boris Bobrinskoy to support this promising community. For more than 30 years Father Boris carried the responsibility of the parish (the Crypt was established as a parish in 1973).

Among the francophone Orthodox parishes of our Archdiocese, the Crypt is one of the largest in number of faithful. Its location in Paris and its link with the cathedral made it a favourable meeting place. It accompanied and supported many emerging francophone parishes of our diocese, in Belgium and in France, in the period of between sixties and eighties.

The community has evolved since its inception. The participation of people of Russian origin, in the beginning, greatly contributed to the development of this community, although it is beginning to diminish. The presence of French people who joined the communion of the Orthodox Church, on the other hand, is increasing, along with the ratio of Orthodox coming from other, very different countries – the Middle East, Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa among others. In such a way, the Crypt maintains a multiethnic and multicultural character which drives its richness. It is served today by Father Alexis Struve and Father Elisha (Germain), to whom Father René, although officially retired, is a valuable aid by his advice, his availability for confessions and sermons that he continues to deliver.

Interview with Father René

My life can be seen in two parts: before I encountered the Orthodox Church at forty-five years old, and after.

Madagascar: first spiritual concerns

After studying medicine in Paris, I practiced in Morocco, Reunion Island, and Madagascar. During this period of medical practice, I believe I exercised my activity as well as I could based on my own motivation, rather than any spiritual preoccupation; at least until shortly before my return to France. I then began to wonder about the reasons behind sickness, suffering, death, the reason for this disorder, not only from a physical or pathological viewpoint, but from an ethical, and without admitting it to myself, a religious viewpoint as well. This went on to the point that, a few days before my return to France, I met with an old Jesuit Father in a Catholic nursing home, to open myself up to these initial concerns. Without answering directly, he simply said, “You have a problem, I cannot respond to you now, but you do not have the right to forget about it.” It was at this time that I met Karine, a secretary at the German Embassy in Antananarivo, a place I felt called to practice medicine. We married civilly in Antananarivo in 1964.

Meeting with the Orthodox Church

Having returned to France and settled the material questions of housing and work, I returned to my preoccupations, which by this time had become markedly religious. I had not at all forgotten. Of a Protestant background, I had never taken any interest in worship, Sunday school, or catechism; I found it all profoundly boring. Moreover, I hadn’t been baptised until the age of 15, my parents having forgotten to do it. I had therefore no desire to return to Protestantism.
Knowing absolutely nothing about the Catholic Church, I made a few attempts to follow the celebrations. I was accompanied by Karine, of Lutheran origin, who is more open than me. But nothing helped. Roman Catholicism left me completely indifferent. I then found a job in occupational medicine. One day, on my way to the office on Boulevard de Courcelles, I noticed that there was a Russian Church on Rue Pierre le Grand. I stopped my car to have a look. There was a service with very few people— I then realised it was for the feast of Ascension. I was stunned and said to myself, “I have to come back.” I told Karine all about it that evening and we returned together to the church two months later, a Sunday of July, 1965. Something happened this time. When we left, at the end, I said to Karine, “Now, I know, it’s here. I’ve found it, or rather, it’s found me. I don’t need to search any longer.” That day, God gave me a sign. I knew that it was the result of my worries, my need to search any longer. “From this moment, we both went to all the services: Sunday, Saturday, and during the week on the occasions when they were held. I didn’t understand a word of Slavonic, but that wasn’t important. We had a few texts that allowed us to follow along. It was Father Pierre Struve who chrismated me in 1965, at the Crypte. I was fortunate to have Karine by my side on this journey in Orthodoxy, being chrismated one year later by His Grace Georges Tarrassov. She followed her own path. Father Nicolas Obolensky married us religiously in March 1967. The welcome that we received in Orthodoxy, through the priests and faithful alike, was, at the time, extraordinary.

Commitment as a priest

En 1965, année de mon entrée dans l’orthodoxie, nous sEn 1965, the year I entered Orthodoxy, we went to Bussy. Archbishop Kallistos Ware, who was at the time a simple priest, passing through Bussy, had then said: «Being a priest is a unique experience, nothing else offers the same.» A year after I started coming to the cathedral, Father Anatole, who was a deacon at the time, stopped in front of us and said to me, «Since you’re still here, can you help us? ». It was at this point that I asked to serve. I initially started serving in the altar, then after a year Archbishop Georges Tarrassov ordained me subdeacon. When I was ordained deacon, I celebrated a liturgy at Saint Serge, and Father Alexis Kniaizeff was surprised to see that I was able to celebrate in Slavonic. After seven years at the cathedral, at my ordination as Deacon, the Archbishop told me that my place was not there, that I had to go down to the Crypte. That was a bit painful, but I obeyed. For five years I served as Father Boris’ Deacon. Subsequently in 1978, I was ordained priest. It was Father Boris who taught me everything, and he was very happy to do it. He was a very patient teacher, solid and profound; I never would have had such training elsewhere. For me, to be a priest was the greatest happiness that God could give to a man. The priest has a spiritual contact with the faithful; it’s a relationship of father and child. He is the father of the family and of the entire parish. Of course, it’s him who has the greatest responsibility, the greatest worries. To be a priest while trying to earn a living requires a bit of acrobatics, but you manage. Sometimes money is a bit tight. In terms of material things, being a priest is not always easy, but spiritually it is simple. It’s extraordinary to see the priest consecrate the Holy Gifts- of course it is the Holy Spirit who consecrates, but that goes beyond the priest- he consecrates them to a family that is around him. The priest has a relationship with the faithful that you cannot find elsewhere in the Church. This relationship is at another level, it passes through the love of God; it is something unique.

Theological studies

To understand what was transforming our lives, I went to Saint Serge to study theology. I could have contented myself with “I become Orthodox,” and left it at that. I was already 44 years old. But I wanted to go further. When I started at Saint Serge, Father Alexis Kniaizeff asked me, “but you’re French, what are you doing coming here?” But I was soon welcomed in an extraordinary way, in particular by Olivier Clément, Father Elie Mélia and Father Nicolas Koulomzine, who gave me private lessons in French. All the courses were in Russian, except those of Olivier Clément and Paul Evdokimov. I had to organise my time between working and taking courses, which was a bit of a juggling act, but I was happy to do it. I did five or six years of studies at Saint Serge. I loved all the professors, and they loved me. They were of deeply open hearts. It wasn’t every day that they had a fifty-year-old student in their classes. In addition to this, in the neighbourhood where I worked, there was a Catholic priest, in a rift with his hierarchy because he took the liberty to teach the Gospel in his own way. He was an extraordinary pedagogue and a man of great heart. He greatly admired Protestants. Orthodoxy, however, he had no
idea what it was. He had a passion for the Bible, the Word of God and he left me with this: the meaning of the Word that is Christ. I thus received twice the lessons on the Gospels.

Pastoral service

Going from the cathedral to the crypt was a bit difficult as I was very spiritually attached to the cathedral, it was there where my heart was opened to Orthodoxy. However, the Archbishop was right: as a priest, my place was no longer in the cathedral. I also served two times a month during eight years at Colombelles. There, I experienced a very strong connection with the faithful. I was their priest and they were my parish. I was a bit of a stranger when I first arrived there. There were one or two skin-deep reactions, but they didn’t last. It was a marvellous parish, I was very happy there during those eight years. Karine would came with me, and we were very welcomed by the Korotkov’s, who have remained very close friends. From the beginning, I knew that I wouldn’t stay there, and I thought about succession- firstly to have a deacon, secondly to have a replacement priest. At the end of those eight years, I was able to leave my place to a deacon and a priest; I left the parish without abandoning it. By chance, in the beginning, I celebrated at Nantes, Nancy, Rouen…. I was sent as a replacement. I was warmly welcomed, but I didn’t know the faithful, their habits, the material disposition of the places, I came knowing that I probably wouldn’t return, which was a bit difficult. It was necessary, as they were places in need of a priest, but that was where it ended. You assure them a service, more than human or spiritual contact. For two or three years, I was thus sent right and left. I then went to share myself with the parishes of the Crypte and of Colombelles (Caen-France).

The role of the Crypte and the Future of the Archdiocese

The parish of the Crypte essentially has a pilot role, as she is an expression of the cathedral with which she directly, organically linked. She has the guarantee of Orthodoxy and its services, from its inspiration. At the same time, as a centre of reference, instruction, knowledge, she is marked by the weight of this link with the cathedral of which she is very much a part. For the other parishes dispersed throughout the suburbs and the provinces, it is a reference to the fact that she is the crypt of the cathedral. She is under the authority, the direct assurance of the Archbishop. The Crypte, therefore, has a great responsibility. Concerning the Archbishop, the first challenge is to know what we will become. We have an active Archbishop, who completely assumes his responsibility and his functions, but he is alone. What will become of the Archdiocese is hypothetical. I am not going to get involved in any monkey business; I always steer clear of that. But simple common sense makes you think that it’s all a question that should be discussed between the ecumenical patriarchs and Moscow, and we are not, in the midst of this, simply a carrot, an exchange currency. For the Orthodox faithful of the whole Archdiocese, this incertitude is an insult. I am very worried about the fragile state of the Archdiocese. God, protect our Archdiocese as long as possible! How can we project the future of our diocese? I pray that it will remain independent and continue its mission.

How to increase your faith

I am now ninety years old and I am still alive. Father André Scrima wrote, “I would like my death to be the greatest feast of my life.” I was given an extraordinary party for my ninetieth birthday- and there you have it, my feast is over! When the faithful come to confession, during their youth they think about mistakes they’ve made. We have therefore to show them that Christian life is not about avoiding mistakes; a good lesson in secular morality would suffice to do that. Next, there is the question of death, everyone thinks about that. It’s a test, a fear, not death in itself, but what comes after. Even Christians fear death. Myself, without really having fear of death because I have put myself in God’s hands, I ask myself: what is it to be, what is being after death? Everyone thinks about that. For some time, I am no longer troubled by this question. I am completely relaxed. I found these words of sister Emmanuelle, “Life is good. Death is good. Life is beautiful, death is beautiful.” These are Orthodox words. Death, seen in a Christian perspective, of course. I am not worried, I’m not saying that I won’t have to pay the price for all the wrongs I’ve committed, but death is good because we are with Christ. When, how, we shall see. The construction of faith demands en entire life, which
poses as a problem for those who die young and didn’t have the time, but those who die young are loved by God and their problem will be solved; there is nothing to fear. It is slow, an evolution. Even for a priest, for a celebrant of the liturgy, despite the carcass, the animal nature. One must constantly interiorise his faith, think of it all the time. And then one should read, particularly the Desert Fathers, the Apophthegms. Of course we must pay attention. It is important to read with a pencil in hand. We are babies beside these giants of the faith. Each time you read something that touches you, make a note of it, find it elsewhere, note it again. Saint Anthony the Great- we know the demons he faced- at the end, he said, “I no longer fear God, I love him.” One should also read Fathers such as St. Gregory of Nyssa, certain passages of Saint Denis the Propagate, Saint Maximus the Confessor when he wasn’t hermetic, Saint Symeon the New Theologian- there are extraordinary passages here. Isaac the Syrian is also magnificent. One should take notes and one thus shapes in this way, for important passages here. Isaac the Syrian is also magnificent. One should take notes and one thus shapes in this way, for

We feel that the emotional centre is the cordial region. It of course isn’t the anatomical heart. It is the integration of the entire being, something inside of oneself, and it is from and around this point that one lives. So, it is necessary to nourish oneself through reading, it’s necessary to have the time to do it, despite work, family, hobbies, vacations… It’s not at all simple to conjugate. The more we age, the more we reduce our exterior needs, the more it is possible to interiorise, and the more we think about the future. We see that there is nothing outside of Christ, “He was before all things. He is, he was, and he is coming!” Amen.


ORDINATIONS

Archbishop Gabriel was::

- ordained deacon the hypodeacon André Lossky the 24th in Saint-Serge (F-Paris)


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