

Christian Education: a Retrospect and a Prospect

A Keynote Address

for the Conference of the Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist
on 'Revealing Christ to the World'

6 – 8 July, 2007

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I've been asked to speak to you on 'Christian education from the cradle to the grave'. I'm going to modify that very general topic somewhat and present something that is highly personal: a retrospective, based on over fifty years in education and communication; and a *prospective*, in that I shall derive lessons from my experience and apply them to what we should do now. –Not, therefore, 'Christian education, from the cradle to the grave' but 'Christian education from *my* cradle to (not far short of) *my* grave'.

During that half-century, I have been, first, a Boy Scout leader attached to a church troop in South London; then a Cambridge don for ten years, teaching English literature from a declaredly Christian standpoint; from my late twenties a member of the Liturgical Commission of the Church of England and then of the Anglican Church of Australia, entrusted with the task of expressing the Christian faith in worship; for twenty-two years Professor of English Literature at Newcastle University, New South Wales; and throughout that time on the governing body of an Anglican seminary; then a Director of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge; and finally, Principal of what is the only institution in Western Europe that teaches the Orthodox faith in English at all academic levels from introductory to doctoral studies. Besides publishing Christian fiction, composing prayers and translating the Psalms, I have run a national symphony orchestra and organized grand opera, and I have also administrated in Newcastle Cathedral a production of the Chester Mystery Plays, playing the parts of Lucifer and Herod. – From that last, you will know with what level of seriousness to greet my observations.

I shall be talking of the problems that face Christian education in the twenty-first century in the United Kingdom. However, I want first to take you to another focus for Christian educational endeavour: to the great sub-continent of India. My wife and I return from every visit to her birthplace as red-hot evangelicals: the chaotic glory of that deeply religious country cries out for

the light of the gospel. Yet nearly two thousand years of heroic missionary toil have made little progress, so that you can still find in India the closest living approximation to that pagan world to which Christianity was first preached.

Some years back, we were in the city of Haridar [Haridwar] at nightfall, joining the thousands who every evening throng the banks of a rushing, wide but shallow torrent, watching the clear head-waters of Mother Ganges stream over white, polished boulders from the snowy foothills of the Himalayas to invigorate the central plains of India. Hindu temples on the far bank flamed with sacrificial fire, with the circular waving of lamps in the ceremony of *aarti*, to the sound of priests chanting their praises to the great river-goddess. Suddenly, the darkening current bobbed with little centres of light, as thousands of tiny palm-leaf boats, each laden with flowers around an oil-lamp and driven by a palm-leaf sail, were released into the torrent by worshippers on either bank. I remember whispering in my wife's ear: 'Only the Orthodox would know how to deal with *this*.'

By that I meant that Protestants might feel obliged to destroy the ceremony as being worship offered to false gods. In discouraging idolatry, they would take from that society one of its cherished communal celebrations, an expression of the sanctity of all things and an honouring of the life-giving power of water. They would kill the fun in favour of their own dark conventicles that promote not life but crucifixion and proclaim through grim posters – posters seen at railway stations throughout India and often the first contact of Indians with Christianity – that "'THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH' (Romans 6.23)".

What might the Orthodox do? They would fill the temples with beautifully robed priests, holding candles to symbolise the light of the gospel, swinging censers of incense to sanctify and bless the sacred waters. They would explain that the reverence directed to Mother Ganges was an unknowing tribute to the one creator God behind all so-called gods (an idea not unpalatable to Indians), that the water had been given to refresh both the land and our own bodies and souls, to wash away corruption and through baptism to bring us to new and eternal life. And the boats, little centres of light spreading out into all corners of the darkness, would each have its palm-leaf sail converted into a Palm Sunday cross, to signify the light of the gospel spreading to all parts of the earth, under the sign of that eternal and creating Word who brought all things into being, who as man died on a cross but rose again to proclaim victory over death and to reconcile all things with himself, 'trampling down death by death', so that all mankind might conquer death and be transfigured into images of him, as lights to the world in their various generations.

There are several reasons why the Orthodox might achieve this transformation that does not repudiate a good already there. In my last decade, I have discovered among the Orthodox a fuller and more universal version of the Christian gospel. As our Liturgy puts it: *'We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity.'*

Orthodoxy has a kinder view both of God and of Man: of God as 'the lover of mankind' rather than an offended, wrathful figure drawn from the Old Testament; of man, not as totally depraved as a consequence of the departure from God but as a being who remembers something of what he or she was meant to be, in whom the image of God is not entirely obliterated. Hence, we yearn toward a lost Eden, and still retain a capacity to work with God towards our salvation – the capacity we call *synergy*. The emphasis is on resurrection as much as crucifixion, with Christ's death not a substitutionary sacrifice of the innocent to appease the Father's need for legal justice but the prelude to a victory by the perfect Man over sin and death on our behalf.

And because Orthodoxy has not lost the gift of worship, or a feeling for 'the beauty of holiness', or a sense of the sanctity of all created things, it would be possible to see the ceremonies of Haridar [Haridwar] as a stirring of reverence for God in the glory of his works, a rejoicing in the essential goodness of creation – a reaching-out to the unknown Christ whose Spirit permeates all things and who has not left vast numbers of the human race without a glimmer of his presence. The ceremony would not therefore need to be destroyed but to be transformed and perfected by the good news of Christ.

If we have such a treasure in store, this has implications for Christian education east and west. We will not be excused if we hoard it in a ghetto or treat it as the secret knowledge of some exclusive religious club. The time for nervousness about so-called proselytizing is past, if ever there was such a time. The Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies was founded in Cambridge because other Christian denominations wanted us to be there, because we have from our unbroken Tradition insights to contribute to the understanding of the Christian faith, because people like the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams had in his youth one of his three formative experiences of the presence of God, at an Orthodox liturgy. Great Britain is sick, the Churches struggle to cope and are losing heart and numbers: our fuller gospel is the remedy. - Or to change the metaphor: the sea of the unchurched is vast, the shoals of fish are such that there is no need to trawl in other peoples' waters – though, as Father Michael Harper has wittily put it when talking of our outreach programme, THE WAY: 'If the fish insist on jumping into the boat, we will not throw them back'.

If I describe my Christian education half a century ago, it is because it was not untypical of those times. The official teachers were almost without exception incompetent. I was taught the faith largely by accident. The Sunday School to which I was sent by unbelieving parents 'to learn the difference between right and wrong' was led by two slightly dippy twin sisters who in the week were kindergarten teachers and on Sunday set us to colouring-in pictures of Jesus standing amidst a flock of sheep. My clearest memory of later Sunday Schools is of my first lesson, at the age of ten, in contraception, which came from other boys at the back of the class and which I found both horrifying and fascinating. The local vicar was an Associate of King's College, London (AKC), well-meaning, conscious of his lack of academic qualifications: I cannot recall him teaching any doctrine and his sermons were vague reflections on current events. At primary school, one Scots lady taught us to recite the names of the books of the Bible and shook us violently by gripping each side of our shirt-collar if we made a mistake. A popular myth was that on one occasion she had shaken a child so violently that her wig fell off and she had rushed from the class-room bald-headed to replace it. During several close shakings I could never detect the clips that were alleged to hold it on. After I won a place at a major public school, I was taught scripture by the French master, a Jew whom we bated mercilessly by demanding why he rejected the obvious conclusion that the messianic prophecies proclaimed Christ. His reasons were, as I remember, highly plausible. Next year, R.I., Religious Instruction, was taught by the Greek master, who loved boys, translated Greek plays for Penguin Books, and once confessed to me a yen to restore the pagan religions of Greece and Rome. As we approached the age for confirmation, we were prepared by the Chaplain, who doubled up as a maths master and introduced himself as, first and foremost, a mathematician. Being smart, we boned up on a new heresy every week '- Sir, I find Arianism very persuasive' – and so stretched him to rebut last week's heresy at each new session.

I came into contact with real Christianity by what C.S. Lewis once called 'good infection'. First through the Cubs and then through the Boy Scouts, I met three loving and idealistic people who set a standard of behaviour of such overwhelming righteousness that I honoured them, wanted to be like them, and hence to understand the strange, irrational faith that made them tick. Still a mere deist in my first year at Cambridge, I spent my time reading Christian books – the epistles of St Paul in that modern version by J.B. Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches*, the writings of C.S. Lewis, Thomas à Kempis and so forth – till in early summer I burst into tears hearing a record of Paul Robeson singing 'Were you there when they crucified my Lord?' That week I told the College chaplain that I had moved from unbelief to

Christianity – only to be greeted with the news that I was the one person he had met from my year who had journeyed in that direction.

My wife thinks I may have been unlucky and points to the efforts of the Churches to improve Christian instruction. Certainly, she is right to remind me of the influence on our early years together of the magazine *Renewal*, with its mind-engaging yet Spirit-filled exposition of a revived, pentecostal faith. Yet my fifty years as a teacher of English Literature lead me to suspect that the paths of conversion and the means of teaching the Christian faith have not much changed. When I taught English Literature in 1998 as a Visiting Professor in the University of Zhengzhou, central China, the Communist Party Secretary attached to our department told all my graduate students that they could not hope to understand English literature without reading the Bible. Yet in the early 1960s in my first academic post in Wales, in Cambridge for the next ten years, later in Australia and right up to the present day, the knowledge of Christian doctrine and the scriptures that students bring to their work has been and is more or less non-existent. I have yet to meet the student who, without prompting, can pick up that Polonius' advice to his son Laertes in *Hamlet* – 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be' – is not from the Bible but is worldly wisdom in direct contrast to Christ's injunction: 'Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn thou not away' (Matthew 5.42 in the King James version).

Yet if there is not much change, perhaps in the methods and certainly in the results of Christian education, the context in which that education must take place is radically altered. When I began teaching, the United Kingdom was still, residually, a culture permeated by Christianity. Many of my schoolmasters were Christian; of the three men who supervised my studies at Cambridge, the two atheists had both won scripture prizes at school, one in England, the other in Australia, and the Christian went on later to write distinguished religious poetry. The Cambridge English Faculty held noted Christians: among them Jack and Joan Bennett, the medievalist John Stevens, and C.S. Lewis himself. The ethos of our studies was humanist, its values and assumptions still Judaeo-Christian. We were yet in the era of the upright unbeliever, brought up in an intensely Christian background, who had rejected the faith as irrational yet still retained unquestioned its moral premisses. But they could not pass on those unsupported premisses to a second generation.

When I took early retirement in 1998, I had been for twenty-two years Professor of a Department where, for all that time except for one brief interlude when we engaged a tutor on a short-term contract, I was the only Christian among some twenty-three or so staff. My subject had been taken

over by 'Theory', the creation of continental and American literary philosophers who rejected our humanist assumptions as unfounded and a means of political and social coercion, who condemned any doctrine of a continuing human nature as 'universalism' (thus rendering the literature of the past irrelevant), who made all meaning and values relative, who denied the significance of the author and any supposed 'intention' he or she might have had, who asserted that human personality was itself a 'language-construct' and who 'deconstructed' literature as having no discoverable meaning, being only a field for continuous and ambiguous interpretation. The 'canon' of so-called great works was attacked, curricula revised, Shakespeare, Dickens, Wordsworth and others at least in theory demoted, and the study of comic books was accorded equal esteem to research on Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Students who rejected 'Theory' tended to be marked down and I remember an undergraduate from the large literature department at Monash University complaining on ABC radio that it was impossible to remain a Christian beyond one's first year.

Meanwhile society as a whole had been subject to the greatest educational change ever: the advent of the mass media. From before I was born, there was the development of tabloid journalism on a large scale, of the film, of radio and of records. From my youth, it has been television, then home videos, CDs and DVDs, the easy recording of sound and vision, and now the internet. I first recall noticing the power of television when it became impossible to call any meeting on the evening when *The Forsyte Saga* was telecast.

That change vastly increased the nation's opportunities for learning and for being entertained. Its malign aspects might not have been so great had it not coincided with a rejection politically of the socialism of the immediate post-war years (often of Christian non-conformist origin) and a distrust of state control that in countries like India had made the developing media primarily an instrument of instruction. In the west, the Reithian ideals that had founded the BBC as a means of moral and cultural education were mocked and in effect rejected by giving large parts of the media to commercial interests dependent on advertising.

I must remind you that I speak from a Luciferian and Herodian perspective: emphasising the successes of the 'dark side', telling perhaps no more than dangerous half-truths. But my viewpoint shows me a progressive debauching of the British population in the last forty years by means of the mass media. The evidence is there in the change in popular music from the Beatles to the violence of 'heavy metal' and the Sex Pistols; in popular comedy from the humane characterisations of *Dad's Army* to the sordid inanities of *Men Behaving Badly*. The need for advertising revenue led commercial TV

companies to build a mass market by exploiting human weakness and appealing to base instinct and the lowest common denominator, so that millions now absorb themselves in the voyeurism of *Big Brother*. The advertising that bombarded families (who at one time were reported as leaving the television running for eight hours a day on average) promoted the consumer society, stimulated artificial needs, appealed to social envy and acquisitiveness, promoted anxiety and discontent, and obsessively stimulated and debased human sexuality as a means for promoting sales.

Such developments coincided with a move politically to the right, with a belief that self-interest best motivates society, with an abhorrence of government intervention, a rejection of so-called 'paternalism' and 'do-gooding'. The victory of capitalism over socialism and communism world-wide meant a growing promotion of 'market forces' as the key to society's well-being. 'Business-values' and the extension of business practices into all walks of life are now preached as a mark and recipe for excellence, in government, in schools and universities, even in the Church. From Lucifer's perspective, it would seem that British society, in the choice between God and Mammon, has opted unequivocally for Mammon. If you seek to understand why educated Muslims commit terrorist outrages in the name of Allah and Sharia law, it is because they repudiate the corruptions of western life, corruptions in which their parents and often themselves have been complicit and from which they seek to redeem themselves through violent self-sacrifice.

We live in what is proclaimed as 'a post-Christian society'. That may be an overstatement: but, certainly, Christian educationists have not worked in so pagan an environment since the days of the early Church. What then shall we do? The elements of persuasion are largely in hostile hands; the old, haphazard, half-competent methods are no longer enough. We must infiltrate the media, the schools and universities, with our own well-trained propagandists. But to do that we need teaching institutions that can inculcate the same communication skills and efficiency as are commanded by the enemy. We need well-trained priests; yet the Orthodox Church has no functioning seminary in the United Kingdom. We desperately need educational bodies such as the Institute. Yet the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies struggles for funds to keep going, plagued by sectional rivalries and the belief that intellectual and spiritual knowledge is only a dispensable supplement, compared to simple faith.

Of course, the situation has never been so bleak as Lucifer's viewpoint has painted it. In my youth, we had C.S. Lewis and Archbishop Anthony Bloom exploiting the relatively new medium of radio for broadcast talks on the faith that captured large audiences and were later published by popular demand.

My younger son, the only one of my four children who has drifted away from the faith, still regards the films *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *The Mission*, and what elder son once called the 'Christian allergies' of the Narnia tales, as some of the major influences on his childhood. Recent television presentations of *The Monastery* and then *The Convent* commanded such audiences for their portrayal of the transforming power of life in a Christian community that the Religion and Ethics Department became the flavour of the month at the BBC and money for religious programmes is now much easier to come by.

The educational problem that Christians now face is not, I think, what I thought it to be for most of my working life. It is not primarily the challenge of scientific materialism, or of Darwinian evolution, or Enlightenment rationalism or that false 'scientism' which claims that what science cannot comprehend has no reality. Bodies such as the excellent Faraday Institute in Cambridge battle such creeds in the name of a science not necessarily inimical to religion. But I cannot say, in a lifetime of trying to challenge scientific materialism, that I have made one convert by that means. If people read Richard Dawkins in such numbers as to make him a best-seller, it is because they have *already* rejected the faith and seek a justification – however inadequate.

The human need for God, for meaning, for a faith to live by, does not go away – whatever the post-modern critics of 'universalism' might say. It seems that the population-drift from country to city is not so harmful to religion as we romantics once feared. I quote from the United Nations *State of the World Population Report 2007*:

'Rapid urbanisation was expected to mean the triumph of rationality, secular values and . . . the relegation of religion to a secondary role. Instead, there has been a renewal in religious interest in many countries.' [*The Times*, 30 June 2007, p.79, 'Faith News']

There is a reviving interest in religion here and world-wide. The problem is that, if they are coming back, they are not coming back to *us*. The Christian Research English Church Census 2005 (with responses from over half the known churches in the country), though published under the title *Pulling Out of the Nosedive*, reported that congregations were still declining at the rate of 2.3% a year, as against a rate of 2.7% in the 1990's. Roman Catholics and Methodists were worst affected, the Church of England having suffered a decline of 'only 11%' in the past seven years, as against the national average of 15%. Only the Pentecostals were picking up numbers and were now more numerous than Methodists. To get a spin-free picture of what is happening:

attendance at Sunday mass in the Roman Catholic Church has declined from 1,703,000 in 1989 to 875,000 in 2005, a decrease of 49%.

If not back to the mainstream-Churches, where have the seekers gone? A close cousin, product of the same primary school and scout troop as myself, slipped easily from the Arian Anglicanism of our boyhood into becoming a Muslim – admittedly to marry a Muslim girl. Some of my pupils went to eastern religions, interesting themselves in Buddhism, Hindu beliefs, transcendental meditation, mysticism and yoga. (Incidentally, Orthodoxy also benefits from being ‘eastern’, somewhat exotic and perhaps a shade esoteric.) My brother has gone to ouija boards, ‘channelling’ and divination, and now to organising ‘Spiritual Fairs’, where sitting amidst a plethora of arcane alternatives, he offers spiritual counselling. Many of my students and staff made use of mind-expanding drugs – and here perhaps is the common factor. All seem to have been seeking experience, a spiritual and emotional ‘high’, contact with the divine or ‘the Other’, with the supernatural or the more-than-rational. Hence it is that the single instance of growth among Christians here is the Pentecostal Churches.

But if ‘we have seen the true light, if ‘we have received the heavenly Spirit’, if ‘we have found the true faith’, then we should be the natural refuge of those who wander among the many cults in a world not unlike that of pagan Greece and Rome. In three hundred years, the Christian faith drew to itself the known world: if then, why not now?

Looking back over my fifty years of teaching, thinking of my contemporaries who rejected the faith, I see two crucial failures: we have failed to preach a full gospel, and we have failed to live up to the gospel we had.

A novel situation since the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, has been that it is Christian-derived beliefs that have most often been used to attack the Christian Church. We have been remarkably successful in persuading the world of some of our basic doctrines. Hindu and Buddhist reformers paid us the compliment of extensive imitation, so that by the end of the nineteenth century it was possible to promote some ‘world-faith’ that seemed to be a distillation of the best in all religions and was alleged to be superior to divisive Christian doctrine. The French, the American, the socialist revolutions were derivative from Christianity in their basic ideals. The ‘truths’ that the Declaration of American Independence held to be ‘self-evident’ were truths that stood on an unacknowledged foundation of Christian faith, and as statements of any historical or contemporary reality were manifestly untrue. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ‘Man is born free’ is nonsense as a statement of fact: it makes sense only as a belief in what Man was intended by God to be and as

what he might become in the liberty of Christ. Where except in the Christian gospel has 'the brotherhood of man' been taught, in human culture or in world religion? Human 'equality' is unbelievable as an account of our physical or mental gifts or our political power: we are only of equal value because we are esteemed such by the love of God. As for 'inalienable human rights', such an idea would be inconceivable to a Roman father contemplating his family and slaves or to a medieval knight viewing his serfs – 'human rights' only have reality if we obey Christ's injunction to treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves and if we accord to other human beings value equal to ourselves as children of God.

This is the danger of a partial gospel. We have taught successfully only one side of a Christian paradox – that we are free in Christ but slaves to God; that others should accord us 'equal rights' as children of God but none of us have any 'rights' that we can demand from God. Because we have taught only half of the paradox, we are meeting a half-truth that has the power of a Christian heresy. We western Christians find it hard to defend ourselves against a charge of cruelly denying those 'basic rights': the so-called 'right' of a woman to choose, to control her own body and so to abort her child, the 'right' of any individual to avoid suffering by euthanasia, the 'right' to express one's sexual preference in what ways one pleases, the 'rights' of children to do as they wish, the 'rights' of animals, plants, now even fish. Essay after essay from my undergraduate pupils passionately rejected the Church for infringement of 'human rights'.

But the major losses of young idealists to the faith in my lifetime seem to me to have been three-fold. In the first phase, we lost the best of several generations to the Christian heresy of communism: to the ideal of human brotherhood, to the gospel abolition of distinctions of race, class and sex, even if it was also at the same time the heresy of seeking to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth by violent political struggle. I was taught by men who had fought against the Catholic fascist Franco in the Spanish Civil War, who accused the Pope after the Concordat between the Vatican and Mussolini of blessing fascist planes as they departed to bomb defenceless Abyssinians. The historical record of Christian Churches denying the brotherhood of man by favouring oppressive regimes, of siding with the ruling classes, identifying with national interests and condoning military conquest is incontestable – we save face by lauding the exceptions.

There, we betrayed the gospel that we had. But the attempt in recent years to make the Church a force for social justice and international justice, though atoning for past hypocrisy, has tipped us into a new lopsidedness, where we largely neglect the Church's eschatological destiny. We forget that our

kingdom is not of this world and that it is the Second Coming only that will usher in the renewal of earth and heaven and the reign of peace.

The next episode of loss that I would identify in my lifetime is more controversial. It began in the fifties and sixties of the last century and continues to the present. Among my undergraduate contemporaries at that time, I saw friend after friend, once active members of the Crusaders or of the Christian Union, who abandoned Christianity entirely and even became hostile, just as soon as they had relations with the opposite sex. You might see that crudely as abandonment to the lusts of the flesh, though some at least of them went on to make stable and successful marriages. Yet they never went back. The Churches' ambiguous and grudging attitude to human sexuality had convinced them that Christians were 'wowers' (to use the Australian term): against sex, booze, and all the pleasures of this life. I think the Churches east and west have never fully come to terms with the influence from the late third century of monasticism and ascetic celibacy. There is still, despite Christ's wisdom in choosing the married Peter and the celibate Paul as twin pillars of his Church, a suspicion that celibacy is not a gift given to some but in some way a 'higher', more spiritual way of life and monasticism a model to which all Christian endeavour should aspire. Orthodoxy is particularly prone to this distortion, which encourages prejudices against the body that came probably from outside Christianity, from gnosticism and dualist cults. Without kowtowing to lasciviousness or compromising on the gospel strictness, The Churches need to recover the doctrine of body and soul as one unity needing redemption, but with the things of the body, including sexual pleasure, an aspect of God's good creation, and not to be downgraded or abused.

A correspondent in *The Times* recently explained his defection from the faith as occurring when he found out that the Church had been telling lies about sex being good only in marriage and discovered that it was good fun outside. That leads me to point to a progressive defect in western theology – one which the Orthodox and the Pentecostals are happily without. Contrary to the gospel, we have in the west tended to downplay the metaphysical reality of evil and the power of the evil one, ignoring the fact that for much of the world the attraction of Christianity has been and is its power to deliver from evil within or without, human and demonic. The only answer to *The Times* correspondent would be to question not the reality but the *nature* and *origin* of his pleasure. If it was philosophically tenable for Augustine to define evil as simply a privation of good, it is nevertheless the case that there is a terrible, powerful and demonic pleasure in doing evil. I have talked with men who have killed in battle and confess to the joys of bloodlust. In sex too, there is pleasure in cruelty, in domination, in corrupting, in selfishly using another, in

misdirecting what was intended to be an immense force for bonding a man with a woman, and making it an irresponsible and private gratification. But we cannot counter properly the charge of wowseryism levelled against the Church till we can assert the full doctrine of the goodness of the body as created by God, together with the capacity of evil to lead us into perverse and demonic pleasures.

I could talk about the more recent loss to the Church of those who go into Earth-Mother or Gaia cults, whose love for the natural world leads them to see Christians as a destructive force who exploit their supposedly God-given 'dominion' over all creatures and all things and violate the natural world. It is something to be grateful for that the Orthodox Church has retained a veneration of all creation as an expression of God's nature and was early in expressing concern for the environment. We have had the advantage too of not being till now much implicated in the ugliness and the irreverent destruction that has characterised western industrial development. In this case, our strengths harmonise with the concerns of those we hope to recover for Christ.

I see the third great loss of the youth of the modern world to the western Churches as being occasioned by the decline of true worship. As at the beginning of the Christian era, when people abandoned the state religion for mystery cults that offered a taste of the divine, so the moderns are abandoning official Christianity for cults that offer personal experience. After many years of trying to mould modern liturgies that would invoke the numinous, I must confess that worship in the churches of the west is, more often than not, an embarrassment: at best, a straining toward something dimly felt, at worst inconsequential chatter to and about a domesticated and trivialised deity. I must say also that I found ten years ago in the Orthodox liturgy what I had been striving toward for much of my working life. I have never gone from an Orthodox liturgy disappointed. It is no accident that the current Archbishop of Canterbury met God there; it was no fantasy when I presented Orthodox worship to you as capable of fulfilling the yearnings of the devotees of Mother Ganges at Haridar [Haridwar].

But for true worship 'in the beauty of holiness' you need instruction; for grappling with unbelief you need education in the full gospel and in the skills to teach it. We cannot do without centres of Christian learning. I regard the Principalship of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies as the most important task I have ever been given and the continuation of the Institute as a necessity if the faith is not to be set back for a generation.

We hear, and we have heard even at this gathering, attacks on 'theology' as something abstruse, unnecessarily intellectual, as opposed to 'simple faith'. But you cannot speak of God at all without entering into theology; and mistaken notions about God are a major cause of the disturbances of this present time. Why must there be a choice, between 'simple faith' on the one hand, and 'theology' on the other? Why either/or, when we need *both*? We would do well to heed the warning of the book of Proverbs:

*The waywardness of the simple will kill them,
and the complacency of fools will destroy them . . .*

*My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,*

*turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding,*

*and if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,*

*and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,*

*then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.*

*For the Lord gives wisdom
and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

[Proverbs 1.32, 2.1-6, New International Version]

Amen.