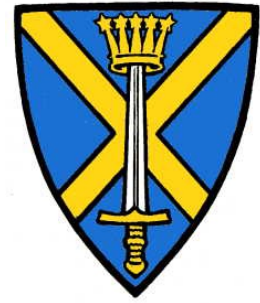


The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

May is always a busy and exciting month. Liturgically speaking, Ascension Day and Whitsunday —two of the most important days of the ecclesiastical year — occur this month. (Depending on when Easter falls they sometimes occur during June, or, in the case of Ascension, April.) On the Ascension Day we commemorate our Lord's glorious ascension into heaven where "he ever liveth to make intercession" for us (Heb. 7:25). And then on Whitsunday —also known as Pentecost— we commemorate the giving of the Holy Ghost. According to the promise of Jesus, the third person of the Holy Trinity came down that first Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and filled the Church and the whole world so that God would always be with us. We will unpack each of these liturgical and theological mysteries more on their respective days this month.

But May is also busy for other reasons. First of all, it is the month of Mother's Day, so we celebrate mothers and all that give to us. I want to say a special "thank you" to all of the moms out there for everything you do, and for your love and self-giving sacrifice to make our homes and lives wonderful! Second of all, May is important for us here at Saint Alban's because it is the month when we have the Amanda Hichkad Walk. We have been raising money for this event that support Cancer Life Net at Upper Chesapeake Medical System for a few months now. "Team Saint Alban's" is one of the top-ten fundraisers this year, having raised over \$2,500. Over the years we've raised around \$10,000 to support this great local work. The walk will be held on Saturday, May 14th at John Carroll School. I do hope you can make it out for the walk, and thanks again for your support.

There is this false idea out there that traditional churches, with orthodox doctrinal beliefs are not interested in doing anything but helping people die and go to heaven, and that it is the theologically liberal and (so-called) "progressive" churches that are only interested in helping people with their temporal needs. This is patently false, especially in the case of Saint Alban's. We do it all! Our main mission is indeed to preach Christ-crucified for the sins of the world, but we also strive to "love our neighbor as ourselves", as so over the years we have raised countless sums of money, and donated innumerable food, personal items, gifts, and more for individuals and families in need. We have worked with state and private agencies that assist the poor and needy, and those overcoming addiction and other problems. And our constant support of diocesan charities to help the poor abroad is very well known. So Saint Alban's does —and has always done— a lot to help those in temporal need, regardless of who they are or where they come from. So don't let anyone tell you that you can't be both an orthodox Christian believer and a person who helps those in need! At Saint Alban's we do it all. May God bless and keep you now and always.

Faithfully, your priest, *J. Gordon Anderson*

May 2022

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Updates from St. Alban's

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

May 23rd-25th - Rogation Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 26th - Ascension Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 6th-7th - Monday & Tuesday in Whitsun Week

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 16th - St. Barnabas (Tr.)

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 24th - Nativity of St. John Baptist

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 29th - St. Peter the Apostle

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jul 4th - Independence Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Aug 6th - Transfiguration

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Aug 15th - Assumption

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

THEOLOGY: *The Christian Mind (Part 3) — Its Conception of Truth*

This month we continue our look at Harry Blamires' famous book "The Christian Mind" (SPCK, 1963) in which he argues that there is a specifically Christian way of thinking about and approaching life. Last month we looked at the Christian mind's awareness of evil. This month we look at its conception of truth. Blamires writes, "*The conception of truth proper to the Christian mind is determined by the supernatural orientation of the Christian mind. For the Christian, truth is supernaturally grounded: it is not manufactured within nature. Secularism asserts the opinionated self as the only judge of truth. Christianity imposes the given divine revelation as the final touchstone of truth. The marks of truth as christianly conceived, then, are: that it is supernaturally grounded, not developed within nature; that it is objective and not subjective; that it is discovered by inquiry and not elected by majority vote; that it is authoritative and not a matter of personal choice.*" (pp. 100-101)

The secular conception of "truth" is, according to Blamires, the opposite of all of this. Truth is not supernaturally grounded, but rather grounded in something manufactured by people. Truth is subjective, which means that there can be multiple, even contradictory truths, as one hears in the popular bromide "I have my truth, and you have yours." What is true is determined by what is popular. And ultimately truth is whatever I choose to believe. All of that encompasses the the secular understanding of truth. One can see the problem with this almost from the outset. If there are multiple truths—my truth, and your truth—in the sphere of morality, and they are contradictory, that is a major problem. For example, to say, "It is right to murder Jews in concentration camps," and at the same time, "It is wrong to murder Jews in concentration camps," is complete nonsense. Or to say something like, "My truth is that stealing is okay, and your truth is that it is wrong, and both of those can be true at the same time," is foolishness, because two opposite things cannot be true at once. (N.B. we are not talking here about questions that are a matter of opinion or taste, such as "Is McDonald's better than Burger King?") If there are multiple truths then it is impossible for there to be right and wrong. If a man's "truth" is that he must divorce his wife so he can run off with another woman because he is now in love with her... in a world where everyone has their own truth there is no ground on which to morally condemn what he has done! If "Thou shalt do no murder" is just one person's own personal truth then it is impossible for

him to condemn someone else who has a different "truth."

Imagine for a moment if science was conducted along those lines. One scientist proclaims, "It is my truth that a person can defy gravity if he eats enough pineapple." Another scientist says, "Well, that is not my truth, but hey... you have your truth and I have mine! Good luck with your experiments this afternoon." Needless to say there would be a lot of bloody corpses and pineapple bits lying around on the ground. Or imagine if scientific consensus on a particular matter was suddenly overruled by a popular vote. Imagine if instead of looking into facts and experience on some matter—the origins of humanity, the climate, etc.—and having a rational, evidence-based discussion on it scientists just established a theory about it based on whatever popular opinion was current. That would be pretty scary.

Blamires asserts that there is absolute truth, and that it is grounded in God who revealed to humanity in the Person of his Son, Jesus Christ, all to which the Scriptures attest. In John 14:6 Jesus says, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" And then in verse he says, "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.*" So Jesus is the truth of God, and it is in the Bible that we learn about Jesus. Therefore we look to the Scriptures for what is true versus false, so we can affirm and follow the former, and reject the latter. This certainly does not mean that it is always easy to discern the truth. Also, there are many truths that we discover that are not at all written about in the Bible. For example, the Bible is not a scientific text, so it is not going to have anything to say directly about climate change, or evolution, though it does give us general principles that we can use to frame our thought on contemporary matters like these. Where the Scriptures do give us strong, clear guidance is in the area of morality. The Ten Commandments—which are duly recited once a month at 8:00 a.m. Mass—teach us our duty towards God and our neighbor. Here we see that it is wrong to murder, it is wrong to lie, it is wrong to steal, it is wrong to commit adultery, etc. And if we unpack those commandments we discover even more divine truth: it is not only wrong to murder, but also to hate. It is not only wrong to commit adultery, but to look at another person lustfully. (Mt. 5:43-44)

There is truth. To say there is no such thing as absolute truth is a contradiction. As Christians we locate truth in Jesus—not in opinion polls, or our own flighty feelings. Check out Blamires book for a much deeper dive into this topic! ✂

WORLD RELIGIONS: *Eastern Religions and the Christian Religion (A reprint from May 2013)*

Recently in a couple sessions of our Tuesday evening “Confirmation for the Confirmed” class (or, if you are new, our “Inquirer’s Class”) we got onto the topic of eastern religion and what some of the major differences are between them and orthodox Christianity.

One of the most critical differences that we discussed is that eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, are essentially *pantheistic* while Christianity is *monotheistic*. The word *pantheism* comes from the two Greek words: “all” (pan) and “god” (theos). So *pantheism* is the belief that God is everything and everything is God. The word *monotheism* also comes from the Greek. It means “one” (mono) “god” (theos). Thus, Christianity, as well as Judaism and Islam, believe that there is one God who is separate and distinct from the world.

Far from being abstract and unimportant, this difference of understanding concerning the nature of God has far-reaching implications in terms of how we understand ourselves and the world.

While pantheism may sound good on the surface, what this notion that “god is everything and everything is god” actually implies is unreasonable notion that the material world is illusory and evil. Matter is “illusory” because the only thing that is real is the impersonal, universal “one” (“god” or “Brahman” in classical Indian thought). Matter is “evil” because the realm of the finite represents a separation from the ultimate, unchanging reality of which everything is a part. Thus, in eastern thought, if there was a “fall” of man it consists in his creation and his material aspect, whereas “salvation” consists in escaping from the material world and ultimately, after many reincarnations, being completely absorbed into the universal one of which all are a part. Indeed, the Dalai Lama himself in various places writes of a “Primordial Buddha” in which all phenomena (things), pure and impure are dissolved and eventually reborn, as being an empty, impersonal space.

All of this is directly opposed by orthodox Christian teaching. One of the things that the creation narratives in Genesis 1-2 teach is that there is one God who is personal, and who created the heavens and the earth, which are distinct from him. The Creeds which

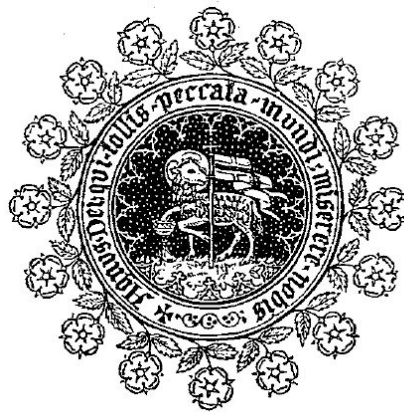
we recite in the sacred liturgy reiterate this: “I BELIEVE in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” (Nicene Creed) And “I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” (Apostles’ Creed).

For the Christian, life is real, and a gift from God. Man was created as the pinnacle of a *real* creation, and as a separate and distinct being to be in fellowship and communion with God the Holy Trinity, who is love. Moreover he was created as a material being, with a physical dimension that is an integral part of who he is. Although man has a fallen nature because of sin, material nature itself is in no way evil or illusory. If it were then God himself could not have become flesh, as orthodox churchmen in ancient times proclaimed to certain gnostic heretics. Most important, by the grace

of God the fallen world is redeemed and recreated, beginning with man himself, and continuing with the whole of creation by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Salvation in the Christian religion is new life in the new heavens and earth! Not a “disembodied” absorption into a universal, impersonal “One.”

We do not have to do too much thinking to understand how this basic difference - that the material world is evil and illusory; or good but fallen and capable of redemption - plays out in different

areas of human life. Here is one example: if the material world is evil then we do all that we can to escape from it. Therefore what we do in or with our bodies is of no consequence and of little importance to anything whatsoever. But most westerners - even “armchair Buddhists” - really cannot except accept that view. We believe that our bodies are part of who we are, and, though fallen, are sacred and good. The same is true for others, and so we engage in acts of charity to help alleviate the suffering of others as much as we can and give them a better life in this world. This is the Christian world view, which still underlies (at least at this point) our culture. This world view has given rise to science, philanthropy, medicine, and the alleviation of much suffering across the globe. And all of this is based on some very fundamental differences in how God and the world are viewed. ☩



PARISH NEWS & UPDATES:

Building Project Update

We are making excellent progress with our building project, which includes expanded parking facilities, (along with the requisite storm water management features), and two small additions to the church building. We recently met with a Baltimore-based architect who is going to be working with us and the engineer to plan the additions. They will (eventually) include office space, relocation of restrooms and kitchen, expansion of the sacristy, and a small chapel. The main goal at this point is just the parking and storm water management. Indeed, the rector noticed a person drive into the completely full church parking lot a few Sundays ago, and then turn around a drive right out. Hence the need for more parking. Once the parking is expanded we can do this other much-needed work on our physical plant. Most importantly, we will be able to open up the church to have more seating. Updates are available any time from the rector or Kristi Sjöholm-Sierchio. Please do continue your generous giving to the building fund so we can bring all of this to realization for the glory of almighty God. A formal fundraising process for construction will begin later on in the year.

Yoga at Saint Alban's

Beth Dixon's yoga classes have gotten off to a tremendous start! She is a trained instructor and offers these classes for free for people of all ages. The response to her excellent classes has been amazing. You can join these classes any time. Tell a friend about them too, as they are a great way to introduce people to our parish family.

Do It Anyway

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

-Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Parish Hall Flooring

Several people have commented on the dilapidated state of the flooring in the parish hall. We are planning on replacing it, but need to wait until after the parking and stormwater management project is completed. In the meantime our cleaner is slowly working on stripping off the old wax so it doesn't look so bad. Thank you for your patience!

New Mass Settings for Trinitytide

Saint Alban's has such good singers that we are adding two new settings (music) for the 10:00 a.m. Mass. Well, one is actually an older one that we used to sing but which fell into disuse, and that is the *St. Stephen Service*, composed by John Corina, Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of Georgia. The other one is indeed new to us and that is the *Missa Orientis Partibus*, composed by William Coscarelli. The Anglican Parishes Association says of this setting, "This mass setting was composed in 2004 by Mr. William Coscarelli, Music Librarian at the University of Georgia and the organist and choirmaster at St. Stephen's Parish, Athens, Georgia. The piece is based on the hymn tune *Orientis Partibus* [*Office de la Circoncision Sens*] (no. 324 in the 1940 Hymnal). The tune is familiar to many and easy to learn, and *Missa Orientis Partibus* is designed to be a contemporary, yet traditional alternative to commonly used mass settings such as those by Willan or Merbecke." These two settings, along with the Merbecke and Shaw settings, will provide some musical variety for us during the long season of Trinitytide.

Thank You For Your Support

"The minister is ordered, from time to time, to advise the People, whilst they are still in health, to make Wills arranging for the disposal of their temporal goods, and, when of ability, to leave Bequests for religious and other charitable uses." (BCP, p. 320) ☩