

Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain

The Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain and Orthodoxy in the British Isles

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by His Eminence Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira & Great Britain

"I know your works - your love, faith, service, and patient endurance.

I know that your last works are greater than the first.....

Only hold fast to what you have until I come" [Rev.2, 19 & 25]

These words, recorded in the Book of Revelation, were addressed to the angel (or bishop) of the Church of Thyateira by Christ, the "Son of God" [Rev 2, 18]. Thyateira was one of the Seven Churches in western Asia Minor to which messages were addressed, but the city in which this Church was to be found was probably the least significant.



However, although it had no military importance, it was prominent commercially (being on the post-road linking Italy, Greece and Asia Minor with Egypt) and was distinguished for the highly developed state of its guilds. It is recorded that bakers, potters, brass-workers, tanners, leather-cutters, wool and flax processors, clothiers and dyers each had their own organisation there. These guilds, which were rather like trades' unions, would have held both meetings and banquets; and it may be the resulting drunken revelry and consequent immorality that is referred to in part of Christ's message to the Church there [Rev. 2,20-23]. This would have affected the morality of the Christian community; and, despite the fervour of their new-found faith, it is therefore likely that there was still a certain degree of secularism even among the Christians there and that they were called upon to solve the problem of how to live in the world yet not be a part of it.

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In passing and in this connection, it is worth remembering that the Acts of the Apostles mentions a certain Lydia, "from the city of Thyateira and a dealer in purple cloth" [Acts 16, 14], who heard St. Paul preach in the Macedonian city of Philippi and who, as a result, was baptised together with her household. The Church today honours her as the first known European Christian.

From the Book of Revelation, it is clear that there was an established Church in Thyateira as early as the first century. In the third, Carpus Bishop of Thyateira, Papyrus his deacon, and Agathodorus and Agathonike were arrested in the city and taken to Pergamon where, "after many illustrious testimonies given by them", they received the crown of martyrdom (with the Church commemorating them on 13th October). Later, during the long years of the Christian era, this Apostolic See was served by many distinguished hierarchs; and bishops of Thyateira are recorded as having participated in the First, Third and Fourth Oecumenical Councils, while its bishop was represented at the Seventh. However, after the thirteenth century, Christianity in Thyateira passed through many vicissitudes. Yet, from the end of the eighteenth century Christians are once more recorded as being present in Thyateira (by now renamed Akhisar) - only to be uprooted again in 1922. We here in this country, as members of the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain, are these Christians' spiritual successors; and there can be no doubt that, like the first Christians of Thyateira, we are called upon to confront the same question of secularism and how to come to terms with being in the world and yet not being a part of it, and of giving our Christian witness effectively and convincingly.

It was to assist in this that our Mother Church, the Oecumenical Patriarchate, established a diocese for Central and Western Europe in 1922, giving it the title (then in abeyance) of the Apostolic Church of Thyateira. As first Archbishop, it elected Metropolitan Germanos (Strinopoulos, previously metropolitan of Seleucia), who had earlier been principal of the Theological School of Halki. It was an inspired choice, and his pastorate lasted for almost thirty years (1922-1951), during which time he became widely-known as a leading representative of Orthodoxy.



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He came to a country which had had a long and eminent Christian history before the organised Church in these Islands followed the western Patriarchate into schism and heresy in the eleventh century. According to the compilers of the Synaxarion, three members of the Apostolic Church had been responsible for preaching the Gospel here - St. Peter who, after visiting Milan, had "passed over to the island of Britain, now called England, (where) he spent many years and turned many erring Gentiles to faith in Christ"; St. Aristobulus (brother of St. Barnabas), who is called the Apostle of Britain and who was its first bishop; and St. Simon the Canaanite and Zealot. In these Islands, the Celtic Church had shone forth - especially during the glorious period known as the "Age of Saints" when its missionaries preached throughout much of Europe, becoming 'Equals to the Apostles'. In addition, Ireland had been a place of refuge for monks fleeing from iconoclastic persecution; and, later, it was to be referred to as "the New Thebais" on account of the number of its monasteries. St. Gregory the Great, pope of Rome (who some years earlier had been resident in Constantinople), sent St. Augustine to preach the Gospel in England at the end of the sixth century - traditionally after having spoken to fair-skinned and flaxen-haired young men in Rome's slave market and having learnt that they were pagans. Tradition states that, with reference to their origin, he remarked how they were not Angles but angels ("Non Angli sed angeli") and should be co-heirs with the angels in heaven. One of the most significant churchmen of the first millennium to be active in this country was a Greek from Asia Minor, namely St. Theodore from Tarsus who, as archbishop of Canterbury between 669 and 690, reorganised the Church in England. Together with the African-born St. Adrian (who had accompanied him), he established a school at Canterbury where Latin and Greek were taught, together with Roman Law, biblical exegesis, music, rules of metre and computistics. The school (like that established earlier by St. Augustine) soon acquired an international reputation and attracted students from Europe and Ireland. Metropolitan Germanos was therefore heir to all these significant events and traditions.

He was, in addition, heir to attempts by Hellenes to establish places of worship and education here. The former church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Soho, founded in 1677, still stood. This had been built with contribution from (among others) the "Porphyrogenitos" James, Duke of York (later King James VII & II). However, a few years after its opening, it was closed partly on the insistence of Henry Compton, Anglican Bishop of London, who had forbidden the Greeks to have icons there and who had asked that they disown various of their beliefs. When the Patriarch of Constantinople protested to the English Ambassador to the Sublime Porte, the latter replied that it was just as bad to have Romish beliefs professed in Greek as in Latin (!). The church was then handed over to the Huguenots, although it subsequently became an Anglican church under the title of St. Mary. The foundation stone of this building was rescued when it was demolished in 1932 and is now to be found in the narthex of the Cathedral of the Divine Wisdom in Bayswater. It was also in 1677 that the idea of a Greek College in Oxford was mooted. This was to become a reality in 1698, but it functioned only until 1705.

Other attempts were made to set up communities and places of worship and the Imperial Russian Embassy chapel was also used. However, as far as is known, the next permanent place of worship was established in a Greek commercial office in London's Finsbury Circus, with a priest being sent from Greece to serve it. By 1849, the church had become too small and another was built in London Wall to replace it. In the meantime, a chapel had been opened in Manchester - although this was soon replaced by the church of the Annunciation, which is still in use today and which (in 2010) celebrated its 150th anniversary.

An important page in the history of Orthodoxy in this country was turned when an Englishman, Stephen Georgeson Hatherly, was ordained priest in Constantinople in about 1870, being given the name Timothy. Returning to England,

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he opened a chapel in Waterloo Road, Wolverhampton in 1873, dedicated to the Prophet Elias (with the registration being cancelled in 1876). In the same year, he inaugurated a Greek Seamen's Mission in Cardiff, where a permanent church, dedicated to St. Nicholas of Myra, was built in the Byzantine style early in the next century (1905).

By now (1865), Liverpool had also acquired its own church - also in the Byzantine style (and also dedicated to St. Nicholas); and, in London, John Olrid Scott (a son of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott) was invited to design a church (again in the Byzantine style) for those Greeks who had moved away from the City to the healthier and more fashionable area of Hyde Park. The foundations of the church of the Divine Wisdom were laid in 1877 and the first Divine Liturgy was offered there on the Sunday of Pentecost (1st June) 1879. It was consecrated a few years later, in 1882. It is this building, which has subsequently been beautifully adorned with icons and mosaics, that has served as the Diocese's cathedral since 1922.

During Metropolitan Germanos' pastorate, Communities were established in Birmingham (1939), Glasgow (1944), Camden Town, London (1948), and Bristol (1951; but where, in the previous century, Father Timothy-Stephen Hatherley had been involved in another Seamen's Mission).

By the time of the death of the second Archbishop of Thyateira, Archbishop Athenagoras I (Kavvadas) [1951-1962], the diocese had grown to an almost un-manageable size. During the course of his pastorate, he had been assisted by a total of five assistant bishops - Meletios (later Metropolitan of France), Iakovos (later Archbishop of North and South America), Chrysostomos (later Metropolitan of Austria), Iakovos (Virvos, of Apameia, subsequently titular Metropolitan of Christoupolis, and known for his and his sister's work during the London bomb-ings) and Juri (titular Bishop of Ravenna for the Estonians Abroad). In addition, Bishop Matthew of Wilno of the Autocephalous Polish Orthodox Church was incardinated into the diocese (some years later being given the title of Bishop of Aspendos), at the same time remaining responsible for those Polish Orthodox Christians outside their homeland and their Communities. During the Archbishop's pastorate, new Communities were founded in Kentish Town (1957) and Camberwell (1962).

Following the repose of Archbishop Athenagoras I, the Mother Church appointed Bishop Iakovos (Virvos) as locum-tenens of the diocese, which had now been reduced in size through the establishment of dioceses in France, Austria and Germany. It was to this diocese - now renamed as that of Thyateira and Great Britain - that Archbishop Athenagoras II (Kokkinakis) was appointed at the end of 1963 (although he was not enthroned until February 1964) - initially with the title of Metropolitan but, from 1968, as Archbishop. Like his predecessor, he had served as Dean of the Holy Cross Theological School in Boston (U.S.A.) and he was already well-known in religious circles as having been the Orthodox prelate who had been deputed to arrange the meeting of the Roman Pope Paul VI and the Oecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I in the Holy Land at the beginning of 1964. He was later to receive Patriarch Athenagoras during the historic first visit by an Oecumenical Patriarch to England (in 1967) and it was during this visit that (on the feast of St. John Chrysostom) His All-Holiness blessed the partially-completed chapel beside Thyateira House which, the following year, was consecrated by Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon (as representative of the Patriarch). It was during his pastorate that the diocese (again reduced in size, this time through the removal of Sweden, Norway and Iceland from its jurisdiction to be joined with Denmark to form a new diocese covering Scandinavia) experienced a very rapid growth - in part due to the influx of refugees into this country following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus; and a glance at this Archdiocesan Calendar and Year Book will give an indication of the number of parishes founded before his death in 1979. In addition, he established "The Orthodox Herald" as the official

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journal of the Archdiocese, called conferences of the Clergy and Laity that voted on the constitutions proposed for the Communities, Ladies' Auxiliary Societies, Greek Orthodox Charity Organisation, Central Education Council (KES) and Youth. During the course of his pastorate, he was assisted by a total of six bishops - Gregorios of Tropaëou, Chrysostomos of Kyanea, Christophoros of Telmissos and Timotheos of Miletoupolis (all of whom were specifically consecrated for this diocese), in addition to Bishop Matthew and Metropolitan Iakovos (who within a few years retired to Greece, where he passed away in 1976).

Following Archbishop Athenagoras II's death in 1979, Metropolitan Methodios of Axum in Ethiopia was elected to succeed him. Unlike his predecessors, he had had prior experience of England, having worked here as a priest. During his pastorate, he was assisted by a total of nine bishops - Irenaeos of Patara, Kallistos of Diokleia (better known as Timothy Ware and who for many years was the Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Studies at the University of Oxford and who is the author of a well-known book on the Orthodox Church) and Eleftherios of Nyssa (all consecrated for the needs of the diocese), in addition to the aforementioned Bishops Matthew (who passed away on 13th March 1985), Gregorios, Chrysostomos, Christophoros and Timotheos and Bishop Aristarchos of Zenoupolis (who was transferred from the Archdiocese of Australia in 1981). Archbishop Methodios later became Metropolitan of Pisidia and reposed in Athens on 5th July 2006.

Following Archbishop Methodios' departure from London in 1988, the Mother Church elected Bishop Gregorios of Tropaëou as Archbishop. So far during this pastorate, two assistant bishops have been consecrated - Athanasios of Tropaëou and Theodoritos of Nazianzos (who, however, returned to Greece in 2009) - and he continues to be assisted by Bishops Chrysostomos and Kallistos (who, in 2007, was raised to the rank of titular metropolitan). Sadly, Bishops Timotheos, Aristarchos, Christophoros and Irenaeos had to retire on account of ill-health. The first-named reposed in Athens in 1999 and the second reposed in the same city in 2002. Bishop Christophoros passed away in London early in 2003 and Bishop Irenaeos reposed in Athens at the end of 2009.

In 2005, the Archdiocese was again reduced in size with the Maltese Islands being transferred to the Metropolis of Italy. The number of parishes continues to grow and the Archdiocese now embraces 115 churches, communities and monasteries, with new communities in the process of being created to meet the needs of the Faithful. The majority of parishes possess their own places of worship, even if only a few of the churches have been purpose-built for Orthodox worship. However, due to the magnanimity of the Church of England and the Catholic Apostolic Church in particular, the Communities have been able to acquire suitable premises not only for places of worship but for schools and community centres - and this has invariably also involved great sacrifices and generosity on the part of the Faithful.

As is well-known, the Archdiocese places especial emphasis on education. It was involved in the establishment of the Hellenic College of London in Knightsbridge (which had an enviable academic record but which has now closed); and at the beginning of September 2000 it inaugurated the first Orthodox Primary Day School in England - under the title of "St. Cyprian's" - and which is situated in Thornton Heath in the London Borough of Croydon. In addition, it supports the activities of the Greek School of London (that operates under the auspices of the Hellenic Embassy). Further to this, it operates Greek Evening and Saturday Schools in almost all of its well-established Communities (as well as in some others); and some, such as those of the Community of St. Andrew in Kentish Town and the Cathedral in Birmingham, possess their own fine purpose-built buildings. In addition, it encourages the work of other existing Greek schools that operate independently of the Archdiocese. Furthermore, all the Greek Schools hold special celebrations to honour the Three Hierarchs (Ss. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom);

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and the Archdiocese organises an annual celebration of Greek and Christian Letters to coincide with the Hierarchs' liturgical commemoration on 30th January. There are officially accredited chaplains at a number of British Universities. An Archdiocesan Seminary was established in North London but which has now closed. Furthermore, there is a flourishing School of Byzantine Music, based in Wood Green, which is training future cantors for our Church.

In order to disseminate the teaching of the Orthodox Church (and in addition to The Orthodox Herald), the Archdiocese publishes a weekly leaflet which contains the text of the Sunday Gospel and Epistle passages and a sermon; and it has recently been involved in the publication of The Divine Liturgy of our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom (1995 and which is in the process of being reprinted) and An Orthodox Prayerbook (first printed in 1999 and reprinted in 2007). All these publications are bi-lingual, being in Greek and English. The annual Calendar and Year Book of the Archdiocese (now in its 85th year and, since 1998, produced in two formats) has become a recognised and authoritative handbook for Orthodox and others in these Islands. In addition, there is a weekly religious programme (broadcast on Monday evenings on London Greek Radio - LGR). Furthermore, there are clergy who also broadcast on this same station at other times or on cable television; while others, together with members of their parishes, produce regular magazines, bulletins and other publications.

The Archdiocese, following the commands of Christ, is active in charitable works and its main organ for this is the Greek Orthodox Charity Organisation. In addition, there are organised Ladies' Auxiliary Societies in almost all those parishes that meet regularly (as well as in some of the others). Clergy and laity of the Archdiocese regularly visit local hospitals and prisons.

There are organisations of Orthodox Youth (under various nomenclatures) in many of the parishes, and their work is co-ordinated in part by an annual Conference. There is an annual Archdiocesan Youth Camp, which from 2008 has been held on the Archdiocese's permanent campsite at Church Stretton (in Shropshire); and the parish of St. John of Kronstadt in Bath has in the past organised a very successful camp for younger children at Donhead St. Mary in Wiltshire.

The Archdiocese, which now covers the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic, is multi-national and, therefore, multi-linguistic. Although the majority of parishes use at least some Greek in their worship, most use English (to a greater or lesser extent), while others use Latvian or Slavonic, and a little Irish is used on occasions in Ireland. Welsh and other languages have also been used in the past. From the point of view of statistics, of the 123 present members of the clergy of the Archdiocese, 37 - or just under one third - are not from a native Greek-speaking background.

It is extremely difficult to estimate the total number of Faithful belonging to the Archdiocese. However, a recently-published estimate of 600,000 is certainly over-generous; but it is significant that - according to a recent survey - the Orthodox Church is one of only two Churches (and the only episcopal one) whose membership in this country is increasing.

There are at present seven churches bearing the title of Cathedral in London as well as one in Birmingham and another in Scotland. In addition to these, there are eighty-eight churches and other places where worship is regularly

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offered, eighteen places (including University Chaplaincies) where the Divine Liturgy is celebrated on a less-regular basis, five chapels (including that of the Archdiocese), a monastery and a hermitage. In addition, there is the world-famous Monastery of St. John the Baptist in Essex, which depends directly on the Oecumenical Patriarchate and whose Founder was the saintly Archimandrite Sophrony, a pupil of St. Silouan of the Holy Mountain.

It was St. Arsenios of Cappadocia (1840-1924) who prophesised that "The Church in the British Isles will only begin to truly grow again when it begins to venerate once more its own saints". In this respect, there is a growing devotion among all Orthodox Christians to the saints of these Islands - both those of the first millennium and those, such as the Grand Duchess St. Elizabeth (a granddaughter of Queen Victoria and a great-aunt of Prince Philip) and St. John Maximovich, who have been associated with them in the recent past. The memory of Brother Lazaros, killed (some would say, martyred) within the Cathedral at Cambridge, remains vivid; and it was in a London hospital that the saintly Metropolitan Nikolaos of Halkis reposed in 1975. In this respect, it is encouraging that the Patriarchate of Moscow has recently "blessed the institution of the Synaxis of All Saints who have shone forth in the lands of Britain and Ireland" and appointed the third Sunday after Pentecost as the day on which they are to be commemorated.

However, before bringing this overview of the Archdiocese to a close, it would be wrong not to mention our brothers and sisters in the Faith who belong to other jurisdictions in these Islands. Indeed, for the better organisation and promotion of Orthodoxy in these Islands, the year 2010 saw the establishment of the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops with Jurisdiction in the British Isles, which will meet twice yearly. In addition to the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain, our Mother Church has a Ukrainian diocese here under Bishop Ioan of Parnassos (who resides in Belgium) and there is a deanery of the Patriarchate's Archdiocese of Orthodox Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe (which has its see in Paris). In addition, we are in full eucharistic communion with the historic Autocephalous Orthodox Patriarchates and Archbishoprics. In these Islands, the Patriarchate of Antioch has a Cathedral near the Regent's Park, as well as a British Deanery, and is under the care of Metropolitan John of Western and Central Europe; the Patriarchate of Moscow's Diocese of Sourozh covers Great Britain and Ireland and is under the care of Bishop Elisey; the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (which is in full canonical and eucharist communion with the Moscow Patriarchate), whose congregations in the British Isles are under the spiritual oversight of Archbishop Mark of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain; the diocese of Bishop Dositej of the Patriarchate of Serbia (and who resides in Sweden) covers Great Britain and Scandinavia, and there is an episcopal vicar (in the person of Father Milenko Zebic) resident in Birmingham; the Romanian Orthodox in this country come under the care of Archbishop Iossif of Western and Southern Europe; the Bulgarian Orthodox are under Metropolitan Simeon of Central and Western Europe; and the Georgian Orthodox are under Bishop Zenon of Dmanisi & Great Britain. In addition, mention must also be made of the Archdiocese's decision (taken in conjunction with the Leventis' Foundation) to fund the building and furnishing of the Church of St. Gregory the Theologian in Uga in Nigeria's Anambra State (within the Patriarchate of Alexandria's Diocese of Nigeria), as its contribution to the celebration of the 2000th anniversary of Christ's Incarnation.

This, then, is the present situation of Orthodoxy in the British Isles. From this description, it is possible to get a picture of the 'works' of the Archdiocese. God Alone knows the 'love, faith, and patient endurance' of its members and whether their 'last works are greater than the first' [cf. Rev. 2, 19]. Through its various activities, the Archdiocese tries in humility to cultivate the Christian message among the flock entrusted to its care by means of the Mysteries (or Sacraments) and other acts of worship of the Church, through prayer, fasting and the study of God's Word in Holy Scripture and the writings of the Fathers of the Church, through the practice of the Works of Mercy described by

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Christ [Matt. 25, 34-36], and by being a living witness to the truth of the message of the Resurrection and the Mercy of Christ. By following the Teaching of Christ, Who assures us that He is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" [John 14, 6], we shall avoid the tempting sirens of secularism, becoming thereby "blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world" [Phil. 2, 15], being in the world and yet not part of it. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, "hold fast to what you have" and cultivate it in Christ until such time as He comes [cf. Rev. 2, 25].

Adapted from an address delivered on the occasion of the annual Archdiocesan Youth Conference held at Wood Green on Friday, 21st April 2000.