

tradition beyond a basic grasp of the gospel and a highly-polished approach to winning converts? As one Orthodox wrote to me, 'I have heard Evangelicalism described as something of a revolving door' — good at making converts, less so at nurturing and keeping them. We need to reappropriate the riches of our heritage in a way which applies to Christian living today the convictions which shaped the lifestyle as well as the thought of so many of our forefathers.

For those who are tempted to treat all this looking back as irrelevant to God's work today, Nick Needham's exposition offers food for thought regarding the nature of authentic tradition and the place which it should have in our thinking, thus providing some helpful guidance as we seek to distinguish authentic from aberrant tradition — an issue with which the Orthodox have long wrestled.

What has Constantinople to do with Geneva?

In the light of the concerns expressed above, it might be tempting to ask why we should bother engaging in 'dialogue' with members of the Orthodox churches. Clearly, there are fundamental differences between us (and among us also) and contentious issues will have to be faced in any Orthodox-Evangelical contact. Nonetheless, if we are to be faithful to the fullness of God's revealed word and if we long to see the church grow towards maturity, we have much to learn from one another. Bradley Nassif exemplifies the value of dialogue as an Orthodox teaching at an Evangelical institution, and his article outlines some of the ways in which such conversation might be taken forward. It is my hope that we shall see something of this nature taking place in the

United Kingdom before too long. This issue of *Evangel* contains articles by Orthodox as well as Evangelicals and is intended as a contribution to the process of mutual understanding; each writer has been allowed to speak for himself, and I would reiterate the traditional editorial caveat that the views expressed are purely those of the authors and inclusion does not imply agreement!

I suppose that what I am saying could be summed up in the dictum that to better understand another tradition we need a deeper understanding of our own. That commits us to hard work, praying and thinking about issues which underlie how we live as Christians in this world in which we have been placed. Yet in all our labours, it would be well for us to keep our eyes on the hope that lies before us, the hope of a day when our earthbound, partial and sometimes distorted theologising gives place to the reality that supersedes all our present activity, that of seeing God face to face. On that day, we shall at last be like our Saviour, for we shall see him as he is. On that day, too, the church will be fully and finally perfected. May that hope animate us here and now!

Footnotes

1 No general introduction to Orthodox theology is included in this issue, as an excellent one by Gerald Bray appeared in these pages not too long ago: 'Eastern Orthodox Theology in Outline', *Evangel* 14.1 (Spring 1996), 14–22.

2 For a stimulating Evangelical assessment of Orthodox soteriology, see Don Fairbairn's recently published article, 'Salvation as *Theosis*', *Themelios* 23:3 (June 1998), 42–54.

Homily of St. Basil of Caesarea on Genesis 1:2–5*

St. Basil of Caesarea (c. 330–379) was one of the greatest figures in the early church history. He was responsible for giving Eastern monasticism its shape, as well as being one of the 'Cappadocian Fathers', who helped to formulate the understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity enshrined in the Nicene Creed. This homily is included here as an example of patristic preaching at its best.

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Homily II.

'The earth was invisible and unfinished.'¹

1. In the few words which have occupied us this morn-

ing we have found such a depth of thought that we despair of penetrating further. If such is the fore court of the sanctuary, if the portico of the temple is so grand and magnificent, if the splendour of its beauty thus dazzles the eyes of the soul, what will be the holy of holies?

Who will dare to try to gain access to the innermost shrine? Who will look into its secrets? To gaze into it is indeed forbidden us, and language is powerless to express what the mind conceives. However, since there are rewards, and most desirable ones, reserved by the just Judge for the intention alone of doing good, do not let us hesitate to continue our researches. Although we may not attain to the truth, if, with the help of the Spirit, we do not fall away from the meaning of Holy Scripture we shall not deserve to be rejected, and, with the help of grace, we shall contribute to the edification of the Church of God.

'The earth,' says Holy Scripture, 'was invisible and unfinished.' The heavens and the earth were created without distinction. How then is it that the heavens are perfect whilst the earth is still unformed and incomplete? In one word, what was the unfinished condition of the earth? And for what reason was it invisible? The fertility of the earth is its perfect finishing; growth of all kinds of plants, the upspringing of tall trees, both productive and sterile, flowers' sweet scents and fair colours, and all that which, a little later, at the voice of God came forth from the earth to beautify her, their universal Mother. As nothing of all this yet existed, Scripture is right in calling the earth 'without form.' We could also say of the heavens that they were still imperfect and had not received their natural adornment, since at that time they did not shine with the glory of the sun and of the moon and were not crowned by the choirs of the stars. These bodies were not yet created. Thus you will not diverge from the truth in saying that the heavens also were 'without form.' The earth was invisible for two reasons: it may be because man, the spectator, did not yet exist, or because being submerged under the waters which overflowed the surface, it could not be seen, since the waters had not yet been gathered together into their own places, where God afterwards collected them, and gave them the name of seas. What is invisible? First of all that which our fleshly eye cannot perceive; our mind, for example; then that which, visible in its nature, is hidden by some body which conceals it, like iron in the depths of the earth. It is in this sense, because it was hidden under the waters, that the earth was still invisible. However, as light did not yet exist, and as the earth lay in darkness, because of the obscurity of the air above it, it should not astonish us that for this reason Scripture calls it 'invisible.'

3. '*The earth was invisible and unfinished.*' In saying 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,' the sacred writer passed over many things in silence, water, air, fire and the results from them, which, all forming in reality the true complement of the world, were, without doubt, made at the same time as the universe. By this silence, history wishes to train the activity of our intelligence, giving it a weak point for starting, to impel it to the discovery of the truth. Thus, we are not

told of the creation of water; but, as we are told that the earth was invisible, ask yourself what could have covered it, and prevented it from being seen? Fire could not conceal it. Fire brightens all about it, and spreads light rather than darkness around. No more was it air that enveloped the earth. Air by nature is of little density and transparent. It receives all kinds of visible object, and transmits them to the spectators. Only one supposition remains; that which floated on the surface of the earth was water — the fluid essence which had not yet been confined to its own place. Thus the earth was not only invisible; it was still incomplete. Even today excessive damp is a hindrance to the productiveness of the earth. The same cause at the same time prevents it from being seen, and from being complete, for the proper and natural adornment of the earth is its completion: corn waving in the valleys — meadows green with grass and rich with many coloured flowers — fertile glades and hill-tops shaded by forests. Of all this nothing was yet produced; the earth was in travail with it in virtue of the power that she had received from the Creator. But she was waiting for the appointed time and the divine order to bring forth.

4. 'Darkness was upon the face of the deep.' A new source for fables and most impious imaginations if one distorts the sense of these words at the will of one's fancies. By 'darkness' these wicked men do not understand what is meant in reality — air not illumined, the shadow produced by the interposition of a body, or finally a place for some reason deprived of light. For them 'darkness' is an evil power, or rather the personification of evil, having his origin in himself in opposition to, and in perpetual struggle with, the goodness of God. If God is light, they say, without any doubt the power which struggles against Him must be darkness, 'Darkness' not owing its existence to a foreign origin, but an evil existing by itself. 'Darkness' is the enemy of souls, the primary cause of death, the adversary of virtue. The words of the Prophet, they say in their error, show that it exists and that it does not proceed from God. From this what perverse and impious dogmas have been imagined! What grievous wolves,² tearing the flock of the Lord, have sprung from these words to cast themselves upon souls!

O man, why wander thus from the truth, and imagine for thyself that which will cause thy perdition? The word is simple and within the comprehension of all. 'The earth was invisible.' Why? Because the 'deep' was spread over its surface. What is 'the deep'? A mass of water of extreme depth. But we know that we can see many bodies through clear and transparent water. How then was it that no part of the earth appeared through the water? Because the air which surrounded it was still without light and in darkness. The rays of the sun, penetrating the water, often allow us to see the pebbles

which form the bed of the river, but in a dark night it is impossible for our glance to penetrate under the water. Thus, these words 'the earth was invisible' are explained by those that follow; 'the deep' covered it and itself was in darkness. Thus, the deep is not a multitude of hostile powers, as has been imagined; nor 'darkness' an evil sovereign force in enmity with good. In reality two rival principles of equal power, if engaged without ceasing in a war of mutual attacks, will end in self destruction. But if one should gain the mastery it would completely annihilate the conquered. Thus, to maintain the balance in the struggle between good and evil is to represent them as engaged in a war without end and in perpetual destruction, where the opponents are at the same time conquerors and conquered. If good is the stronger, what is there to prevent evil being completely annihilated? But if that be the case, the very utterance of which is impious, I ask myself how it is that they themselves are not filled with horror to think that they have imagined such abominable blasphemies.

It is equally impious to say that evil has its origin from God; because the contrary cannot proceed from its contrary. Life does not engender death; darkness is not the origin of light; sickness is not the maker of health. In the changes of conditions there are transitions from one condition to the contrary; but in genesis each being proceeds from its like, and not from its contrary. If then evil is neither uncreate nor created by God, from whence comes its nature? Certainly that evil exists, no one living in the world will deny. What shall we say then? Evil is not a living animated essence; it is the condition of the soul opposed to virtue, developed in the careless on account of their falling away from good.

5. Do not then go beyond yourself to seek for evil, and imagine that there is an original nature of wickedness. Each of us, let us acknowledge it, is the first author of his own vice. Among the ordinary events of life, some come naturally, like old age and sickness, others by chance like unforeseen occurrences, of which the origin is beyond ourselves, often sad, sometimes fortunate, as for instance the discovery of a treasure when digging a well, or the meeting of a mad dog when going to the market place. Others depend upon ourselves, such as ruling one's passions, or not putting a bridle on one's pleasures, to be master of our anger, or to raise the hand against him who irritates us, to tell the truth, or to lie, to have a sweet and well-regulated disposition, or to be fierce and swollen and exalted with pride. Here you are the master of your actions. Do not look for the guiding cause beyond yourself, but recognise that evil, rightly so called, has no other origin than our voluntary falls. If it were involuntary, and did not depend upon ourselves, the laws would not have so much terror for the guilty, and the tribunals would not be so without pity when they condemn wretches according to the measure

of their crimes. But enough concerning evil rightly so called. Sickness, poverty, obscurity, death, finally all human afflictions, ought not to be ranked as evils; since we do not count among the greatest boons things which are their opposites. Among these afflictions, some are the effect of nature, others have obviously been for many a source of advantage. Let us then be silent for the moment about these metaphors and allegories, and, simply following without vain curiosity the words of Holy Scripture, let us take from darkness the idea which it gives us.

But reason asks, was darkness created with the world? Is it older than light? Why in spite of its inferiority has it preceded it? Darkness, we reply, did not exist in essence; it is a condition produced in the air by the withdrawal of light. What then is that light which disappeared suddenly from the world, so that darkness should cover the face of the deep? If anything had existed before the formation of this sensible and perishable world, no doubt we conclude it would have been in light. The orders of angels, the heavenly hosts, all intellectual natures named or unnamed, all the ministering spirits,³ did not live in darkness, but enjoyed a condition fitted for them in light and spiritual joy.

No one will contradict this; least of all he who looks for celestial light as one of the rewards promised to virtue, the light which, as Solomon says, is always a light to the righteous,⁴ the light which made the Apostle say 'Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'⁵ Finally, if the condemned are sent into outer darkness⁶ evidently those who are made worthy of God's approval, are at rest in heavenly light. When then, according to the order of God, the heaven appeared, enveloping all that its circumference included, a vast and unbroken body separating outer things from those which it enclosed, it necessarily kept the space inside in darkness for want of communication with the outer light. Three things are, indeed, needed to form a shadow, light, a body, a dark place. The shadow of heaven forms the darkness of the world. Understand, I pray you, what I mean, by a simple example; by raising for yourself at mid-day a tent of some compact and impenetrable material, and shutting yourself up in it in sudden darkness. Suppose that original darkness was like this, not subsisting directly by itself, but resulting from some external causes. If it is said that it rested upon the deep, it is because the extremity of air naturally touches the surface of bodies; and as at that time the water covered everything, we are obliged to say that darkness was upon the face of the deep.

6. *And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters.* Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the

heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit. It is, as has been remarked, the special name, the name above all others that Scripture delights to give to the Holy Spirit, and always by the spirit of God the Holy Spirit is meant, the Spirit which completes the divine and blessed Trinity. You will find it better therefore to take it in this sense. How then did the Spirit of God move upon the waters? The explanation that I am about to give you is not an original one, but that of a Syrian, ... [who] said ... that the Syriac word was more expressive, and that being more analogous to the Hebrew term it was a nearer approach to the scriptural sense. This is the meaning of the word; by 'was borne' the Syrians, he says, understand: it cherished the nature of the waters as one sees a bird cover the eggs with her body and impart to them vital force from her own warmth. Such is, as nearly as possible, the meaning of these words — the Spirit was borne: let us understand, that is, prepared the nature of water to produce living beings: a sufficient proof for those who ask if the Holy Spirit took an active part in the creation of the world.

7. *And God said, Let there be light:*⁷ The first word of God created the nature of light; it made darkness vanish, dispelled gloom, illuminated the world, and gave to all beings at the same time a sweet and gracious aspect. The heavens, until then enveloped in darkness, appeared with that beauty which they still present to our eyes. The air was lighted up, or rather made the light circulate mixed with its substance, and, distributing its splendour rapidly in every direction, so dispersed itself to its extreme limits. Up it sprang to the very aether and heaven. In an instant it lighted up the whole extent of the world, the North and the South, the East and the West.... So, with a single word and in one instant, the Creator of all things gave the boon of light to the world.

Let there be light. The order was itself an operation, and a state of things was brought into being, than which man's mind cannot even imagine a pleasanter one for our enjoyment. It must be well understood that when we speak of the voice, of the word, of the command of God, this divine language does not mean to us a sound which escapes from the organs of speech, a collision of air struck by the tongue; it is a simple sign of the will of God, and, if we give it the form of an order, it is only the better to impress the souls whom we instruct.⁸

*And God saw the light, that it was good.*⁹ How can we worthily praise light after the testimony given by the Creator to its goodness? The word, even among us, refers the judgment to the eyes, incapable of raising itself to the idea that the senses have already received. But, if beauty in bodies results from symmetry of parts, and the harmonious appearance of colours, how in a simple

and homogeneous essence like light, can this idea of beauty be preserved? Would not the symmetry in light be less shown in its parts than in the pleasure and delight at the sight of it? Such is also the beauty of gold, which it owes not to the happy mingling of its parts, but only to its beautiful colour which has a charm attractive to the eyes.

Thus again, the evening star is the most beautiful of the stars: not that the parts of which it is composed form a harmonious whole; but thanks to the unalloyed and beautiful brightness which meets our eyes. And further, when God proclaimed the goodness of light, it was not in regard to the charm of the eye but as a provision for future advantage, because at that time there were as yet no eyes to judge of its beauty. '*And God divided the light from the darkness*'; that is to say, God gave them natures incapable of mixing, perpetually in opposition to each other, and put between them the widest space and distance.

8. '*And God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night.*'¹⁰ Since the birth of the sun, the light that it diffuses in the air, when shining on our hemisphere, is day; and the shadow produced by its disappearance is night. But at that time it was not after the movement of the sun, but following this primitive light spread abroad in the air or withdrawn in a measure determined by God, that day came and was followed by night.

'*And the evening and the morning were the first day.*' Evening is then the boundary common to day and night; and in the same way morning constitutes the approach of night to day. It was to give day the privileges of seniority that Scripture put the end of the first day before that of the first night, because night follows day: for, before the creation of light, the world was not in night, but in darkness. It is the opposite of day which was called night, and it did not receive its name until after day. Thus were created the evening and the morning. Scripture means the space of a day and a night, and afterwards no more says day and night, but calls them both under the name of the more important: a custom which you will find throughout Scripture.

And the evening and the morning were one day. Why does Scripture say 'one day' not 'the first day'? Before speaking to us of the second, the third, and the fourth days, would it not have been more natural to call that one the first which began the series? If it therefore says 'one day,' it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain. Now twenty-four hours fill up the space of one day — we mean of a day and of a night; and if, at the time of the solstices, they have not both an equal length, the time marked by Scripture does not the less circumscribe their duration. It is as though it said: twenty-four hours measure the space of a day, or that, in reality a day is the time that

the heavens starting from one point take to return there. Thus, every time that, in the revolution of the sun, evening and morning occupy the world, their periodical succession never exceeds the space of one day.

But must we believe in a mysterious reason for this? God who made the nature of time measured it out and determined it by intervals of days; and, wishing to give it a week as a measure, he ordered the week to revolve from period to period upon itself, to count the movement of time, forming the week of one day revolving seven times upon itself: a proper circle begins and ends with itself. Such is also the character of eternity, to revolve upon itself and to end nowhere. If then the beginning of time is called 'one day' rather than 'the first day,' it is because Scripture wishes to establish its relationship with eternity. It was, in reality, fit and natural to call 'one' the day whose character is to be one wholly separated and isolated from all the others. If Scripture speaks to us of many ages, saying everywhere, 'age of age, and ages of ages,' we do not see it enumerate them as first, second, and third. It follows that we are hereby shown not so much limits, ends and succession of ages, as distinctions between various states and modes of action. 'The day of the Lord,' Scripture says, 'is great and very terrible,'¹¹ and elsewhere 'Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord: to what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness and not light.'¹² A day of darkness for those who are worthy of darkness. No; this day without evening, without succession, and without end is not unknown to Scripture, and it is the day that the Psalmist calls the eighth day, because it is outside this time of weeks.¹³ Thus whether you call it day, or whether you call it eternity, you express the same idea. Give this state the name of day; there are not several, but only one. If you call it eternity still it is unique and not manifold. Thus it is in order that you may carry your thoughts forward towards a future life, that Scripture marks by the word 'one' the day which is the type of eternity, the first

fruits of days, the contemporary of light, the holy Lord's day, honoured by the Resurrection of our Lord. 'And the evening and the morning were one day.'

But, whilst I am conversing with you about the first evening of the world, evening takes me by surprise, and puts an end to my discourse. May the Father of the true light, Who has adorned day with celestial light, Who has made the fire to shine which illuminates us during the night, Who reserves for us in the peace of a future age a spiritual and everlasting light, enlighten your hearts in the knowledge of truth, keep you from stumbling, and grant that 'you may walk honestly as in the day.'¹⁴ Thus shall you shine as the sun in the midst of the glory of the saints, and I shall glory in you in the day of Christ, to Whom belong all glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

Footnotes

*Schaff, P. & Wace, H., *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* Vol. 8, pp. 58–65.

1 Gen. 1. 2, LXX.

2 Gen. 2. 5, 'every herb of the field *before it grew*.' There seems here an indication of the actual creation, ποιησις, being in the mind of God.

3 cf. Heb. 1. 14.

4 Prov. 13. 9, LXX.

5 Col. 1. 12.

6 cf. Matt. 22. 13.

7 Gen. 1.4.

8 Gen. 1. 5.

9 Joel 2. 11.

10 Amos 5. 18.

11 The argument here is due to a misapprehension of the meaning of the term *eighth* in Psalm 6, and 11, title.

12 Rom. 13. 13.

13 Ps. 119. 103.

14 Gen. 1. 6.

Tradition in 2 Timothy

NICK NEEDHAM

Keywords: tradition, evangelicals, Scripture, church, Paul, creeds

Evangelicals often feel an instinctive hostility to the notion of 'tradition'. In the popular Protestant mind, an extreme antithesis between tradition and Scripture operates, sometimes in very irrational ways. After all, how does the average Evangelical know that his translation of Scripture is reliable, except that he has an Evangelical tradition of scholarship which assures him it is? Tra-

dition in some form is inescapable. Moreover, if we define tradition as the accumulated wisdom of the past, the church's treasure-store of 2,000 years of reflection on the meaning of Scripture, can any sane or humble person afford to ignore it? Is it really honouring to the Holy Spirit to think that I can sit down by myself with a Bible, and the Spirit will then teach me everything in