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**Fr. George Hackney’s Journey: “My sole wish is to continue to be an orthodox Christian”**

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**In an English village**

Near to the geographical centre of England you can find Rolleston, the tiny village where I was born. My family were farmers, as their ancestors had been for generations. In the heart of the village and under the jurisdiction of the Church of England stood the ancient parish church of The Holy Trinity. For centuries it had been the centre of village life. There were no other denominations in the village. As a child I did not even know that other denominations existed. It was in the Church of England that I was baptised and taught the orthodox Christian Faith. It was in the Church of England alone that I learned and accepted the great Orthodox dogmas concerning the Holy Trinity, Creation, Incarnation, Virgin Birth, Resurrection, Salvation through Christ our God from sin, death and the devil, the necessity for sacramental incorporation by Baptism and Confirmation into the ancient Church founded by Christ and the blessings of grace through the other sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Absolution and also the ethical and moral demands of the Christian life.

The Church of England taught me all this and much, much more, including devotion to Our Lady, both in the parishes where I worshipped and in the Theological College I attended as a young man. It was in the Church of England that I learned to accept the faith of Bible and Tradition and to revere the seven Ecumenical Councils, rather than individual interpretation, as the reliable guide to the interpretation of Scripture

**In an English city**

I was ordained deacon in 1968 and priest in 1969 and for 32 years I served in the Church of England as a priest, most of the time in the industrial City of Derby. During those years I sought to pass on to the people that which I had myself received – i.e. that the Church of England was the original and ancient Catholic Church of this nation of England, as its own catechism proclaimed. That it had survived the Reformation troubles with the apostolic succession intact and that it had no special doctrines of its own – only the agreed doctrines of the Universal Church set forth before the Great Schism of 1054; holding to the Patristic Faith and rejecting modern papal innovations. The orthodox Faith with nothing added and nothing taken away.

**First doubts**

All this I firmly believed until 1992. It was the unilateral decision of the Church of England to proceed with the ordination of women to the priesthood that first began to shake my confidence. I could scarcely believe that our Synod and our Bishops had decided to proceed with this unprecedented innovation – ignoring pleas from the Pope of Rome and the Patriarchs of the East that we should refrain from unilateral action on so divisive a matter.

When the General Synod of England voted to accept the doctrine and practice of female ordinations 500 or so clergy resigned almost immediately, believing that these ordinations put the validity of the eucharistic celebration in doubt. In the twelve months following the first ordinations of clergy women the Church of England lost 36,000 regular lay worshippers. This was equivalent to the total number of regular communicants in three average English dioceses. The drift from the Church has continued ever since and the number of laymen and women attending Church of England liturgy in this land continues to fall every year.

**Resignation**

Eventually I resigned from my parish duties in Derby, aged 60, and went into early retirement because I was becoming very concerned at the way the Anglican Communion, not just in England but around the world, is breaking up into factions no longer in Communion with each other.

**Tip of the iceberg**

This is happening over a range of matters doctrinal, ethical and canonical. It is not just about the ordination of women. That was merely the first crack in the wall and a taste of things to come. It was the first sign that those in authority in the Anglican world were willing to surrender orthodoxy and embrace novel doctrines and practices previously quite unknown or previously rejected as heretical. There is not just one issue but many.

**Fragmentation of Anglicanism**

The fragmentation of Anglicanism, which originated in the Episcopal Church of the USA, has spread deep into the heart of the mother Church of England.

I became increasingly unhappy that the Church of England today is becoming less and less like the Church as it was when I was baptised and ordained priest.

In particular the General Synod in London (consisting of Bishops, Clergymen and women and Lay men and women) and the State-appointed Bishops of today are surrendering the orthodoxy of Anglicanism and replacing it with new liberal ways on three fronts: in doctrine, discipline and ethics.

The national Church of England is becoming more and more protestant, more and more liberal, less and less orthodox.

Its Leaders in the Episcopate and its rulers in the Synod seem to be infected with secular ideas which they see as modern and compassionate and in tune with the spirit of modern man and the present age but which plainly contradict the witness of Scripture and Tradition.

This can be seen in many areas today …
in the field of the individualistic interpretations of Scripture that are accepted,
in the ordination of women to the priesthood and soon to the episcopate,
in the revocation last year of the old Convocation Regulations stating that marriage is a lifelong sacramental bond,
in the permission given by some English bishops, such as the present Bishop of Lincoln, for their clergy to give a liturgical blessing to homosexual partnerships as if these were marriages,
in the permitted continuance in Office of higher and lower clergy who publicly deny in the pulpit, on television, in the newspapers and in books and articles even most basic doctrines of the Creed, such as the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ and his virginal conception and birth,
in the official acceptance of the new idea of Provincial autonomy in doctrine which results in Anglican Provinces around the world deciding on their own authority to introduce new doctrines and practices, of a liberal kind, never before held in Anglicanism, and not held by other Provinces…. and many, many other things which flow from this.

**From Communion to Federation**

The Anglican Churches around the world which used to be in full Communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury and with each other are so no longer. The term Anglican Communion is still used by the State Church in England but in reality and truth it has disintegrated into a mere Federation of Churches of Anglican origin. It is no longer true that they are all in sacramental Communion with each other. There is no longer agreement in doctrine, ethics, morals or canon law.

In America already there are, I believe, over 40 Anglican jurisdictions separated and not in Communion with each other or with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Here in England there are at least three different Anglican Continuing Churches not in Communion with the official State Church or with each other .

Moreover the Traditional Movement within the State Church, which began as a resistance to the innovations of 1992, and which I initially joined and took an active part in, still hoping we could reverse the tide of liberalism, is striving to form yet another totally independent Free Province as a refuge for orthodox English Anglicans.

**Flying Bishops**

This movement has been allowed by the General Synod to have four roving Bishops of its own to confirm and ordain members in traditional orthodox Church of England parishes, across Diocesan boundaries. This happens only where the Church Council has voted to resist liberal innovations and has petitioned the Diocesan Bishop for the extended pastoral care of an orthodox Anglican bishop. In the Church of England now a parish can effectively choose its own bishop. This destroys the reality of the Diocesan Bishop as centre of unity in the local Church.

However these so called Flying Bishops operate only under the control and with the permission of the local Diocesan Bishop, who may be one who does not believe in the virgin birth or the Resurrection of Our Lord and may well be permitting his parish priests to have faithful homosexual relationships, despite the pleas of Lambeth Conference, and to give liturgical blessings to homosexual partnerships of both sexes and in most cases will himself be ordaining female candidates into his College of Diocesan Priests. The Flying Bishops have no jurisdiction, cannot select candidates for ordination, and must be in full Communion with the Diocesan Bishop despite the fact that the people and parishes they serve refuse to be so.

**The old Faith**

When I was ordained in 1968 by the Anglican Bishop of Bradford, the Rt. Revd Michael Parker, I believed that our Church of England was the ancient, original, western Orthodox and Catholic Church of this land and that despite its faults and failings (for no Church is perfect) it was the right and proper instrument for the ongoing evangelisation and pastoral care of the English people. The Bishop who ordained me encouraged me in this and held the same belief.

This is what I was taught as a young man at my Theological College. I accepted it then and was guided by it up to my last days as an Anglican.

**Visit to Serbia**

This faith in the orthodoxy of the old Church of England I still held strongly when, in 1983, with my family, I had the privilege of spending several weeks visiting towns, villages and monasteries throughout Serbia and adjacent Regions with Fathers Georgije, Dositej and Longin; at that time parish priests in England and now Bishops of the Serbian Church. At that time I was much encouraged by direct experience of Orthodoxy and Orthodox people in an Orthodox land. It renewed my vision of what the Church of England ought to be and had the potential to become.

**The breaking of a dream**

In these present times I see this understanding of the Church of England, which I was taught and received, being abandoned on all sides by those in authority. Orthodox Anglican congregations, people and priests are in despair. There is a steady trickle of people and priests leaving the Church of England every year. Most of them seek to be received into the Roman Catholic Church simply because the liturgy of Rome is Western in form and almost identical to the Anglican Rite, so they feel at home with it and can worship without major difficulties. This is especially the case with English lay people who initially find Eastern rites baffling.

Even now there are still some Bishops priests and people struggling on heroically to maintain orthodoxy in life and doctrine within the Church of England, but they are increasingly marginalised and ignored. In the year 2000, when I was still serving as an Anglican priest, I was able to take a coach-load of my parishioners to London for a Millennium Mass celebrated in the London Arena and organised by the orthodox resistance network, Forward in Faith. At that Mass there were 800 concelebrating priests and over 10,000 communicants. For a long time I remained an active part of this struggle to recover orthodoxy in our beloved Church. Sadly I think that great Liturgy in the London Arena was probably the last gasp of the orthodox constituency in the Church of England. Many of those who took part in it have now left the Church of England. For myself I cannot accept the claim of Rome to impose new doctrines on the Church without the agreement of an Ecumenical Council; doctrines such as that of Papal Infallibility and the immaculate conception of the Mother of God and therefore I could not ask to be received into the Roman Communion.

**Time out to think**

When you are a very busy parish priest you do not have much time to think deeply about these things, however. The immediate needs of your parishioners are paramount. The day to day demands of the ministry in a large and busy City parish simply leave you tired and exhausted.
Since Annis, my wife, and I came in 2001 to live in comparative isolation near my home village in enforced early retirement I have been able to take time to ponder and to pray.

**The root of the matter**

At root it is all a question of where Authority lies in matters of Doctrine, Discipline and Order in the the Church of God.

This has always been a problem in Anglicanism but in these times it becomes more and more acute as Provinces, Dioceses, individual Bishops and even Parishes and individual priests assert their right to autonomy – their right not to be bound by Scripture, Tradition, the Ecumenical Councils, the Liturgy, or anything other than their own experience and what appears to them to be the dictates of reason in the modern world.

This question of Authority lies at the root of the fragmentation of Anglicanism today.

**Coming home**

After much inner struggle and distress I made a clear decision to seek reception into the Orthodox Church . My sole wish is to continue to be an orthodox Christian and not to continue fighting my own denomination in endless wrangling and arguments over doctrine and discipline in a Church where I can no longer remain in full Communion with the Bishop of the Diocese… a church which with almost every meeting of its Synod strays further and further from Scripture and Tradition.

It has not been an easy decision to leave the Church of England because I have served as a priest for the past 32 years, it has been the whole of my life and I knew that if I entered the Orthodox Church it would have to be in lay Communion since I am not bringing a congregation, group or community with me.

However it is more important to me to be simply an Orthodox Christian in the genuine Orthodox Church than to serve as priest. It is a matter of priorities.

Annis, my wife, and I began to attend Divine Service at the Orthodox Parish of St Aidan and St Chad in Nottingham, England. The parish church is a converted Methodist Chapel on Carlton Hill, Nottingham. To attend liturgy we have to make a 44 mile car journey each time. This will always have been normal for many Orthodox in this country but for 32 years I was used to having the parish church right there on my doorstep! The parish is under the Moscow Patriarchate and all services are served in the English Language, so we have no language difficulties in worship. Although I am more familiar with the Serbian Church than the Russian there is no Serbian Church accessible to where I now live. The parish priest at Nottingham is Fr David Gill and the assistant priest is Fr Peter Brameld. We have two priests and two deacons. Three of these are former Anglican clergy. About half our regular congregation are former Anglicans. The rest are East Europeans and their descendants.

On the Eve of the Theophany this year 2003, eighteen months after resigning my Anglican parish, I was received by Confession and Chrismation into the Holy Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate. At present I am attending the 2 year part-time Certificate in Orthodox Christian Studies course at the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies at Cambridge. This is the first Pan-Orthodox Theological College in England. It is affiliated to the ancient University of Cambridge and has a web-site at http://www.iocs.cam.ac.uk

It feels strange to serve once again as a layman after thirty-two years as a full time parish priest. I still have a lot to learn and I do not know what the future holds. The Orthodox Church really is all that I once believed the Church of England to be – but authentically so. I have come home at last