WHEN THE SAINTS**…**

1st of June JUSTIN MARTYR

4TH of June PETROC

5TH of June BONIFACE of CREDITON

6th of June INI KOPURIA

JUSTIN MARTYR was born in Samaria at the beginning of the second century, and was beheaded in Rome for his faith in 165; an authentic report of his public trial still exists. He earned the soubriquet ‘Martyr’ [witness] twice over; not only because of the manner of his death, but because his whole adult life had been given over to proclaiming the intellectual sense he made of Christianity in the contexts of contemporary philosophy. This all sounds deadly dull, but what he pioneered is vitally important to the nurture and development of the faith for all of us.

Paul, for all his classical education, and his ability to attract gentiles as well as those on the fringes of Judaism, had, on his own admission, failed when visiting Athens and attempting to have serious discussions with the followers of the classic schools of philosophy, who called him a ‘babbler,’ meaning a bird that has copied a few unconnected phrases; in other words, someone who had learned just a little of everything; so he very wisely cut his losses and resolved to preach the simple facts around ‘Christ and him crucified.’ It was going to take a few more decades for others to establish some kind of systematic ‘theology’ from which to proceed, and after two thousand years God’s church has fractured and some parts of it find themselves better equipped for the task than others.

If no interface had been attempted between Christianity and the various branches of philosophy and other secular ‘wisdom,’ the Jesus Movement, if it had survived at all, would probably have been viewed rather as today’s public might think of freemasonry or scientology etc.

Judaism had many admirers among the Roman elite, but some 20 years before Justin’s birth there had occurred a final and irreparable schism between the parent faith and its young offshoot. In addition, while there were good reasons for Christian cells to keep a low profile, an aura of secrecy is never good for public relations, and a great deal of rumour and suspicion surrounded the early church.

The imperial Roman government was not a malevolent tyranny, for the most part, and persecutions, perhaps other than those of Nero, were carried out chiefly, as governors viewed them, for reasons of state. Those comparatively few individuals who stood out for their convictions are hailed as martyrs by the church, but were, for the most part, simply thought of as wholly misguided or even mad.

If the faith were to be accepted as lying within the ambit of established law and custom, it was necessary to reach out and help eliminate suspicion and explain clearly, in terms the public could understand, what Christianity was about, and how and why its adherents acted as they did. This work is called ‘apologetics, and Justin is hailed and celebrated as the first Christian ‘apologist.’

Justin had become completely familiar with his ground. He tells of how, as a seeker, he had emigrated to Ephesus to study philosophy: he had first met with a stoic, adherent of a fashionable and well-reputed method of acquiring the mental apparatus with which an individual might face the world and its ways with equanimity; not a million miles from aspects of Christian faith, you might say, but insufficient for Justin. Now he tried a follower of Aristotle, but with no more joy. Next he tried a Pythagorean, who insisted on his learning music first: a fatal distraction!!! Finally he found a follower of Plato, whose notion of a supreme transcendent being made sense: but it was a conversation he had with a Jewish convert that brought him to Christianity.

If you recall the story of Phillip the Deacon’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, studying Isaiah, the clincher was that Christ had revealed the whole truth of which the prophet had grasped a part. Similarly, Justin maintained that Platonists had attained to part of the truth, which Christ had fulfilled; so he proceeded from common ground in his teaching.

From all of this you can see that Justin was able to succeed where Paul had failed, precisely because he had come to it from the exactly opposite direction. Justin taught purely as a philosopher: throughout his life he wore the pallium, the cloak of a teacher of advanced learning; and he opened schools first in Ephesus, and later in Rome, teaching and debating philosophy for his pupils and against all comers. It was one of these, a disciple of Diogenes the Cynic, who, having been soundly bested in open debate, proved a bad loser and denounced Justin and six of his followers to the authorities as teacher of an illegal religion, for which, when proved, they were beheaded.

Justin left three treatises; two of them explaining clearly and in detail how Christians worship and why they are no threat to society as a whole; the third is a dialogue with a Jew named Trypho, probably based on a real life encounter, though it is likely that Justin may well have given himself some better lines in the write-up than he actually thought of in conversation. ‘By the same token, when he quotes a passage from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, Trypho is allowed to point out that the translation is inaccurate, and to explain what was actually meant in the original. The two part as friends, Trypho affirming: ‘You’ve given me much to think about.’

Justin’s outstanding holiness is demonstrated by his having first sought for the truth with utter integrity, and then put himself completely in God’s hands by teaching publicly and fearlessly a faith that was illegal, very widely unpopular, and with courage, conviction and courtesy to his opponents.

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PETROC was described by Thomas Fuller as ‘the Captain of Cornish saints.’ Little is known about him for sure.

He died in 562, and was a younger son of a Welsh chieftain, who studied in Ireland and set up his headquarters at Padstow [Petrockstowe], from whence he ministered in Cornwell, Devon and Brittany.

In later life Petroc built himself a hermitage on Bodmin Moor, where he lived, having resigned his abbacy at Padstow.

He is said to have made pilgrimages to Rome and Jerusalem; even, less likely, to India, where he tamed a wolf and made a pet of it on the way: he is portrayed with this wolf, or sometimes with a stag, because he was supposed to have sheltered it during a royal hunt. There are a number of churches named after him, and his relics were carried to Bodmin, presumably so as to leave space for the coming veneration of Rick Stein!!!

Petroc, for whatever reason, is associated with the virtue of humility: once, having returned from a pilgrimage in a shower of rain, he is said to have prophesied that it would soon clear up: after several days of downpour he was so mortified by his own presumption that he immediately set off on another pilgrimage.

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It has been said of BONIFACE of CREDITON that no other Englishman had as great an influence on the history of Europe as he did, and yet nobody in England seems to have bothered very much to celebrate his enormous achievements as apostle to Germany, Frisia; Archbishop of Mainz, and reformer of the French church. He is said to be the most important reforming monk between St Benedict of Nursia himself, and Benedict of Amiane.

Wynfrith, who took the name of Boniface some time later, was born in 675, in Crediton, where at least one church is named after him. Educated at Exeter and at Nursling in Hants, he wrote the first Latin grammar to be circulated around England, while teaching and studying himself. At age 30 he was ordained, and became such a successful preacher that he was chosen by his king and the local synod to be the envoy to Burchard, Archbishop of Canterbury at the time.

Boniface, however, was more interested to become a missionary, and visited Frisia in 716, which had already been pioneered; but political matters made further evangelism impossible, so, returning to Nursling the following year, he was elected Abbot, but declined the charge, and in 719 he journeyed to Rome, in order to receive accreditation from Gregory II for mission, in this case to Hesse and Bavaria.

On the way, however, he learned that matters had improved in Frisia, so he remained there for three years, before moving to Hesse; where he wrote a report to the Pope, before returning to Rome to be consecrated Bishop in 722. With the facility of a letter from Gregory, Boniface received help and protection from Charles Martel to evangelise in Hesse, where the story goes that he chopped down a sacred oak; a very dangerous thing to have done, but when it became clear that there was no divine vengeance forthcoming, many converts resulted.

Many monasteries were staffed, in part at least, by English monks and nuns, who gave assistance when Boniface moved to Thuringia. He was humble enough to seek and receive advice from Daniel, Bishop of Winchester, as to the most effective mission strategies.

In 732 Pope Gregory III sent him the pallium creating him Archbishop, which empowered Boniface to consecrate his own bishops north of the Rhine: he founded bishoprics at Erfurt for Thuringia, Büraburg for Hesse; Würzburg for Franconia, and Eichstätt Nordgau.

In 738 Charles Martel defeated the Saxons of Westphalia, which opened up new opportunities. It was here that Boniface wrote a famous letter to the English people asking for help through prayer for the conversion of ‘those who are of one blood and bone with you…’ In fact throughout his whole missionary career Boniface was generously assisted with gifts from monasteries of books, vestments, relics, and, above all, personnel.

Back in Rome in 738-9, he was made Archbishop of Mainz, and while retaining his legatine powers, he called a synod of all German Christians and, among other things, established a hierarchy in Bavaria, and was able to appoint a successor to Willibrord in Frisia.

His next important work was reform of the church in France, where some bishoprics had remained vacant for years; others were sold, or given to quite unsuitable laymen with neither training nor vocation. His ally, Charles Martel, died in 741, but there having been no council for years, between 742-7 various decrees were issued condemning abuses, and standardising the rule of Benedict for all monasteries within the king’s jurisdiction.

An old man of nearly 80, Boniface retired to Frisia, leaving the baton with Chrodegang, another very able reformer, who kept things going as best he could until the reign of Charlemagne.

In 754, while awaiting a group of new converts, he and his companions were chopped to pieces by a gang of ‘Pagans;’ so He is hailed as martyr, but his energy and achievements as missionary and administrator already affirm him as a saint, who might have enjoyed a cushy career in England, but clearly discerned, and acted on God’s distinct call for him to evangelise: the fact that he received as much encouragement and material support from fellow English men and women in his work shouldn’t be overlooked either; but Boniface freely admitted that had it not been for vital support from both Pope and Emperor, he could have achieved little or nothing on his own.

His correspondence shows him to be a man of courage, affection, loyalty, foresight and determination in the face of opposition from many quarters; not least of all Christians who had been only partially converted. Part of his letter to Cuthbert, Archbishop of Canterbury, is to be found at the bottom of this post as an encouragement and guide to the kind of prayer most of us need right now. .

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It’s good to be able to fox Google Chrome; try googling INI KOPURIA

Meanwhile, courtesy of the Community of the Sisters of the Church, who have extensive connections with the Solomon Islands, go to:

http:anglicanhistory.orgoceaniabrotherhoodsteward\_brothers1926.html

which is part of Project Canterbury. At the bottom there is an article: ‘Spearhead,’ by Fr Brian MacDonald-Milne, for a contrast with Boniface, and which shows missionary work at its very finest.

A few generations ago Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands, was known to the outside world, if at all, through the writings of social anthropologists. Think John Frum and cargo cults!

Ini had been a policeman in this area, and during an arrest he was injured and, whilst recovering in hospital, he experienced an encounter with Jesus, who seemed to be saying that Ini wasn’t doing the work Jesus wanted him for; so he got the inspiration to evangelise in the mountain area where he already knew the people through his police work, and where white missionaries were unlikely, for many reasons, to be able to survive.

Under the supervision of the local bishop, Ini devised a system of evangelism based on enlightened principals originally established by the first bishop who arrived in the area in the late c19; that the work should be undertaken primarily by Melanesians, and that nothing should be attempted in areas in which other denominations had already been working.

The website tells how the Brotherhood was inaugurated: Ini gave up his own piece of land for the use of the Brotherhood, and was unanimously elected its first leader.

What emerged from early discussions was a most practical, flexible and thoroughly humane modus operandi which has caught on not only as a successful strategy of evangelising, but one that has renewed notions of Christian community life throughout the world. Instead of community living for its own sake, each small cell exists to serve its surrounding area.

The foundation goes straight back to the Gospels, in which Jesus gives instructions to his disciples about visiting towns to evangelise. If a village would not welcome the Brothers, they would build shelter nearby and find food in the bush, until they were invited in.

Each house was to be manned by four brothers, under the direct leadership of an elder, and as new recruits were attracted, another cell would be formed elsewhere so that the mission spread exponentially. The whole success of the project hung on the reality that the evangelists were natives who lived and worked as natives among their fellows, although, as happens elsewhere, there were regional and tribal differences which, nevertheless, the community members dealt with by working in pairs, each from different backgrounds.

In the community life, disputes and grudges were dealt with quickly and on the basis of not letting the sun go down on anger. Charles Fox, the only white man who served for eleven years in the Brotherhood under Melanesian obedience, wrote that Ini knew the Melanesian mindset, and could help solve disputes in a thoroughly practical manner.

Individuals took vows of celibacy; poverty – not to be paid – and from which they could be released after five years; or earlier on compassionate grounds. The ‘Father’ Bishop remained ultimately in oversight, but the entire project was run by and for Melanesians.

Ini stood out from boyhood as a jovial sociable child, and as a man he had obvious charisma and leadership gifting; was elected unanimously as the first leader of the Brotherhood, not, as Charles Fox writes, because he’d been the founder, but because the choice was obvious.

Charles Fox states that the white civil governing class found him conceited, which he was: Ini resented the institutional racism that existed on the island, and which, reading between the lines, probably did within the mission itself.

There are, however, lurking dangers in remaining too long in the leadership role, particularly when one has invested materially in it as well as emotionally.

When the war came to Melanesia, bringing the Japanese, and the Americans, Ini asked to be released from his vows, and left the Brotherhood in order to join the American labour force, and to get married. Having self-invested to such an extent, and shown himself an example to all, it seems that Ini felt deeply ashamed of marrying, having himself taken a life-time vow. Retired Bishop Terry Brown recalls that Ini died of a broken heart.

With very great pastoral wisdom, Fox writes:

‘In the end, in the early days of the war, Ini left the Brotherhood. He asked to be released from his vows, and was released by the Bishop. Then came the Americans in their thousands. It was a time of great unsettlement for everyone; and for a time Ini went, as the Bishop wrote, ‘Into a far country’. There followed soon the sickness from which he died, but not before he had come back to full communion. The last period of failure was, perhaps, needed for the final lesson in humility, so hard for men of great gifts. The failure did not last long. It was as though God took his hand away for a moment in order that he might hold Ini forever.’

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**PRAYER**

Here are the words of St Boniface in a letter to Cuthbert, Archbishop of Canterbury written in 747, when he was at a low ebb:

‘I would be only too glad to give up the task of guiding the church which I had accepted, if I could have found some warrant for such a course of action in either the examples of the Fathers, or in Holy Scripture.

Since this is not to be found , and since, although the truth may be attacked, it can never be ultimately defeated or falsified, With my tired mind I take refuge in the words of Solomon, ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insights. In all your ways, think of the Lord and he will guide your steps.’

Let us stand firm, then, in doing what is right and prepare ourselves to face trials. Let us wait upon the strength of God and say to him: ‘Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to the next’ Let us trust in the one who laid his burden upon us. What we cannot bear in our own strength let us bear with the help of the one who is all powerful, and who said: My yoke is easy and my burden light.’