



A JOURNAL OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND CULTURE

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NEW BEGINNINGS

Orthodoxy in Today's Scotland

An interview with Greek-born Archimandrite Raphael Pavouris of Edinburgh's pan-Orthodox Church of St. Andrew (Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain) on the growth and outreach of Orthodox parishes in Scotland after the Second World War, and the life and legacy of the Scottish Archimandrite John Maitland Moir, who for over thirty years supported displaced Orthodox emigrants, new missions, and a growing number of native Scottish converts.

RTE: Father Raphael, what can you tell us about the growth of Orthodox Christianity in Scotland?

FR. RAPHAEL: Until a few years ago there were only three Orthodox parishes in Scotland. The two major cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow each had a parish from around the 1950s under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and from the 1990s there has been a Russian parish in Dunblane, originally under the Russian Orthodox Church/Moscow Patriarchate.

The Orthodox community here in Edinburgh dates from 1948 when a Russian priest, Archpriest John Sotnikov, arrived here with former Polish Orthodox soldiers after the Second World War. The congregation included Russians, Poles, Greeks, and Serbs, and although they didn't yet have their own church, they worshipped together as one community under the Patriarchate of Constantinople's Archdiocese of Thyateira and the spiritual guidance of a Polish Orthodox hierarch, Bishop Matthew, who came around the same time. Some people say that the community was called the Church of

Opposite: Archimandrite Raphael Pavouris at the Church of St. Andrew, Edinburgh.

the Nativity, while others don't recall that it had any particular dedication. In the 1970's they served liturgy at the side altar of St. Michael and All Saints Episcopal Church in Edinburgh. Father John Sotnikov remained the priest of this community until 1984. He reposed in 1991.

Archimandrite John Maitland Moir, a native Scotsman, followed Fr. John as the Edinburgh priest and at this time the community entered an altogether new phase in its life. The parish expanded steadily and although by the late eighties and nineties the Greeks were the main constituency, Fr. John made sure that his parish was the *Orthodox Church in Edinburgh*, a church that would embrace all Orthodox Christians who want to worship in it as well as welcoming interested non-Orthodox. Father John introduced daily services and served the Liturgy in Greek, Slavonic and, now for the first time, English. Along with the Greeks and the Slavs a growing number of British converts made the community their spiritual home. Eventually a new constitution was approved and the community took its present form, under the patronage of St. Andrew.

Father John began a great missionary work by contacting ethnic Orthodox Christian immigrants in Scotland, establishing communities, and welcoming newcomers. He was not a missionary in the sense that he attempted to actively convert people, but he celebrated the services and welcomed those who were interested in Orthodoxy, beginning with the Orthodox Christians who were already here. He established communities in Aberdeen, Dundee, the Highlands, St. Andrews, Perth, and near Stirling—first in the university chapel, and then in Bridge of Allan, a town next to Stirling. We no longer go to Perth and Stirling because very few people attended and we couldn't cope with the distances, but we continue to serve Aberdeen, St. Andrews, Dundee, and the Highlands.

Our community here in Edinburgh is dedicated to St. Andrew and the number of parishioners has more than tripled from the 1990's. When I came to Scotland in 1992, the church was in Fr. John Maitland Moir's home at 23A George Square, which had housed the parish since he became the community's priest in 1984.

By 2003, we had outgrown the premises. Fr. John sold his house and the community borrowed money to buy the building we are in now, which faces The Meadows, a public park near the University of Edinburgh. Although it has served us well, after a decade we had about 130 people crowded into our chapel: Greeks, British, Russians, Serbians, Romanians and others.

Again, we had to find room for the growing parish, and we settled on a church that was for sale around the corner. In 2012, a spiritual child of Fr. John's decided to buy the church himself and is helping us to restore it prior to moving there. All of these are blessings from God that we believe came through the prayers of Fr. John, who reposed in April of 2013, and, of course, the work and prayers of many others, clergy and laity as well. There are many devout people in this community who have worked hard to help the church for years.

We are three clergy serving in our Edinburgh community: Archimandrite Avraamy Neyman, Deacon Luke Jeffrey, and myself.

RTE: And what do you have now in the Highlands?

FR. RAPHAEL: In the Highlands there is a small but dedicated community. We worship in Inverness, Fort Augustus and in the Ardross Castle, where we have graciously been given access to the castle's Orthodox chapel. The chapel is within a beautiful castle which belongs to the family of Ioannis MacTaggart of blessed memory, a very devout Greek Orthodox Christian who was Scottish from his father and Greek from his mother. Mr. MacTaggart converted the original castle chapel into a wonderful Orthodox chapel dedicated to St. John the Baptist.



Archimandrite Raphael Pavouris.

It is completely frescoed and even has holy relics and was so beautifully done that you feel you are in Greece or on the Holy Mountain. We serve there about once every three months. Reader Ignatios Bacon was the organizer and motivator for this Highland community for many years and Christine Matheson continues his work with admirable dedication.

We now serve liturgy once a month in the towns of St. Andrews and Dundee, and twice a month in Aberdeen. Father Avraamy serves in St. Andrews and Dundee, and I serve in Aberdeen and the Highlands. In Aberdeen we have an average attendance of forty people, sometimes more, and on Pascha well

over one hundred. In the Highlands we have an average of ten or fifteen people, in Dundee about thirty-five and in St. Andrews about forty.

RTE: And who do the other Orthodox parishes in Scotland serve?

FR. RAPHAEL: The Greek parish in Glasgow was founded in the 1950s, largely by Greek Cypriots. A wealthy hotelier, Sir Reo Stakis, acquired a large church and converted it to a beautiful Orthodox cathedral for the use of the community. As I said, after World War II only the Patriarchate of Constantinople had existed in Scotland until a small Orthodox community was established in the 1990s in Dunblane by the Diocese of Sourozh under the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. This community now is part of the Exarchate of the Parishes of Russian Tradition of Western Europe under the Ecumenical Patriarchate. After 2000, the Diocese of Sourozh also established a community in Glasgow and later in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee. There are also Romanian Patriarchal parishes in those cities. There is very good brotherly cooperation between the clergy and laity of all our Orthodox communities in Scotland and occasionally we hold joint services.

RTE: Please tell us more about Archimandrite John Maitland Moir, who was one of the key figures to make Orthodoxy accessible to English-speakers in twentieth-century Scotland. I had the good fortune to meet him some years before his repose, and was touched by the grace and peace around him. His obituary in *The Scotsman* describes him as, "...A man of profound holiness and bedazzling eccentricity, of boundless compassion and canny wisdom, utterly selfless and stubbornly self-willed, serenely prayerful and fiercely self-disciplined, Father John will surely earn a place as a unique and outstanding figure in the ecclesiastical annals of Scotland."¹

FR. RAPHAEL: Father John was a magnet. Many people found Christ and became devout Christians through meeting him, and even now after his death, we feel he is very much amongst us, helping us through his prayers. He was a man of uncompromising commitment to the Gospel, of unceasing prayer and humility and therefore of Christ-like love.

RTE: He was from quite a good family, wasn't he?

FR. RAPHAEL: Yes, many of his ancestors were illustrious people, and the family was well-established in Edinburgh. One of these was part of the team headed by Joseph Simpson, who used chloroform for the first time as anesthesia in surgery, and although he never mentioned this, we learned over the years that there are streets in the city named after relatives of Fr. John. You could tell he was from a distinguished family by his actions, his gestures and his speech. At the same time he was simple, humble and accommodating. You felt very comfortable with him. Physically, he lived the life of a poor man in the third world, and it was extraordinary how little he needed. He recycled everything he could, and would have lived almost entirely on dry moldy bread with a little cheese (if it was not a fast day!) or olives if we had let him. He once said "If we have olives when we fast and cheese when we don't, we're alright." He was a real ascetic.

Father John's father was Presbyterian and his mother, Episcopalian. They were devout people and gave him a proper Christian upbringing and a good education. After attending one of the best schools in Edinburgh, he studied classics at Edinburgh University and Christ Church, Oxford, and later theology at Cuddesdon Theological College. After his schooling, he taught classics in private schools and for six years at St. Chad's College, Durham. Before being ordained an Episcopalian priest, Father John had come into contact with Orthodoxy while at Christ Church, where he must have met Fr. Nicholas Gibbes, the Oxford priest and former English tutor to the children of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia. He fell in love with Orthodoxy and Orthodox worship, and in fact, he spent the 1950-51 terms at the Halki Theological Seminary near Istanbul, and afterward traveled around the Holy Land and the Middle East. Once when asked when he became Orthodox he said, "My heart, from my youth, has always been in Orthodoxy."

After his ordination in the Scottish Episcopalian Church, Fr. John served faithfully for thirty years in various parishes. Even during his early years as a priest of the Episcopal Church of Scotland he had a reputation for holiness and people would go to him for advice and counsel. We only met him years later, but there was always something special about him. He was a man of God and a man of prayer. As time passed, however, he became increasingly discouraged about the path of the Episcopal Church, and in 1981, at fifty-seven, he went to the Holy Mountain to the great sorrow and disappointment of many people, including his bishop. But if Fr. John prayed about something and believed that it was God's will, he would do it. He left the

¹ Obituary of Fr. John Maitland Moir: <http://www.scotsman.com/news/obituaries/obituary-archimandrite-john-maitland-moir-priest-1-2911536>



Episcopal Church at great personal cost: his position, parishioners, salary... his whole world. When asked about his conversion afterwards, he would say that “he didn’t leave the Episcopalian church, it left him.”

Father John was baptized on the Holy Mountain at the harbor of the Simonopetra Monastery by Elder Aemelianos, then returned to Britain to be ordained by the Greek Archbishop Methodius. He was made an archimandrite and appointed parish priest of the Greek Orthodox community in Coventry, England. Father John was revered, and especially the older Greeks considered him their spiritual father. He *was* their father. Even after he moved to Scotland he would go to Coventry three times a year to hear their confessions. You would see a queue of elderly Cypriots with their children and grandchildren, waiting to see “Pater Ioannis”.

RTE: Then as a convert he spoke Greek?

FR. RAPHAEL: Fr. John spoke fluent Greek, wonderful Greek! Sometimes he would even give me the right Greek word if I couldn’t find it. He always followed what was sung or read in church from the Greek liturgical books he kept in the sanctuary, and on which he pencilled corrections of typing or grammatical errors!

He was also great at keeping in touch. He would register people’s problems, pray for them, and call them. He never failed to respond and he did great pastoral work through writing and telephoning. He was fiercely disciplined in his pastoral care without ever looking fierce at all.

In 1984, as I mentioned, he was appointed as the Orthodox priest here in Edinburgh and served as the Orthodox chaplain to Edinburgh University. His house on George Square was at the heart of the university and the church moved into his living room. Father John attracted people without being very talkative himself. People from all walks of life would just come to sit with him. When you saw him you felt that you could trust this man. I felt the same. He was a great spiritual father and confessor and there was an air of holiness around him; his movements, his clothes, his manners, his wise counsel. Many Greek students who came to love Fr. John stayed in Edinburgh to raise their own families so that they could be nearby to help him organize and run the parish. Some of these students are now doctors and other professionals. At one point I counted seventeen nationalities in this community.

Opposite: Church of the Orthodox Community of St. Andrew, Edinburgh.

RTE: Many converts who have entered deeply into Orthodoxy are connected to spiritual fathers, but Fr. John was rather isolated in Scotland. Who did inspire him?

FR. RAPHAEL: As we say in Greek: he was *theodidactos*, “taught by God”, but at the same time he was also inspired in his earlier Anglican years by other Anglicans including C.S Lewis, whose writings were a great influence on him. I believe Fr. John met him at Oxford.



Archimandrite John Maitland Moir.

After he became Orthodox, he knew both Fr. Aemelianos of Simonopetra and Fr. Sophrony of Essex, but as you say, there wasn't one particular elder. He lived far away from traditional Orthodox communities, but he went to the Holy Mountain regularly every year. On his trips to Coventry, he would travel also to the monastery at Essex. Once I saw him sitting in the hall with his cane. I asked, “Father, what are you doing here in the monastery?” He said, “I'm waiting to make my confession.”

Fr. John was 88 when he died on April 17, 2013. He was always a man of prayer, yet some who knew him well noticed a profound transfiguration after his baptism into Orthodoxy. One person who

knew him from his Episcopalian years said, “There was something different about Father John once he returned from the Holy Mountain. He looked transfigured. It was difficult to describe.”

Father John was very strict with himself, but he cultivated a climate of love and loving informality – devout informality. He didn't like rigid external rules. He was very faithful to the tradition and he would keep it but at the same time he wanted people to feel at home in the church. He said, “Just let people come...” He wasn't harsh, there was no policing, and he had a way of making things work without being heavy-handed. After the service his dismissal was always followed by “Please come to the hall for tea or coffee.” He liked people to stay and talk to each other, but he wouldn't simply sit and

rest, or just enjoy a cup of coffee, his coffee strengthened him to carry on. He was for function, not for form. He didn't like wasting time, he didn't waste a moment of his life and he didn't like comfort. There was no earthly comfort in his life at all. He lived for prayer, for serving God, for serving people. He never said or showed that he was disturbed, and he was ready until his last breath to hear confessions, to open the door, to let people in, to make phone calls.

From the beginning of his Orthodox ministry he established daily services. Unless he was away traveling he always served matins and vespers. He was very punctual: 7:30 am and 6:30 pm sharp! When he was on the road or traveling he would say the same services wherever he was. He had a little bag with his liturgical books, the *Menaion* and the *Paracletike* or *Triodion* and he read the services from the original Greek. Even when we had the service in the church and we did English as much as we could to make everyone feel at home, Fr. John would follow from the sanctuary with his Greek service books, and sometimes gently corrected us from behind the icon screen. You would hear his soft voice, “No, no, no,” if we were singing the wrong Theotokion or something. Once I asked him if, in the fifty years that he had been a clergyman, he had ever missed matins or vespers. He replied: ‘I do not think so’!

RTE: A great well of tradition must have opened to him through those Greek texts.

FR. RAPHAEL: Yes, Fr. John was one of those very mature convert priests who have lived and experienced the Orthodox culture in the mother country. He was able to understand Orthodox people whether they were converts or immigrants.

RTE: Does St. Andrew's follow his tradition of keeping the doors open for anyone who wants to come?

FR. RAPHAEL: Yes, we want to continue his tradition of welcoming people. He wanted to make Orthodoxy known by being accessible and so do we. We are also involved with the university and we have very active student groups, as well as reading groups. We began the groups with Orthodox students, then other non-Orthodox students joined us.

RTE: Do most Orthodox converts come as students?

FR. RAPHAEL: Many of them do, but there are others as well. One convert, who became Orthodox shortly before his repose, was one of the most humble men I've ever met. He was a farmer's vet, a veterinary pathologist who could tell farmers what their animals had died of.

One day his son, who had been coming to the community, said to me, "Come and meet my father." As I stepped into his farmhouse, I saw that about half of his books were about Greece. He was a very genuine person and told me about his experience of Greece in the 1960's. He had been to Meteora and said that he had never forgotten the simplicity of one of the monks he met there. Through all of the following years he had thought about becoming Orthodox, but it seemed such an elevated state of spirituality that he never dared to ask.

When I met him we talked and I said, "I believe you are ready to become Orthodox, but I will give you a week to think and pray about it." I also gave him a short prayer to say. The next week I went back and he said, "I want to be received." He made his confession, I received him and gave him Holy Communion. He looked so fulfilled. We prayed and said goodbye. His wife told me that after I left he told her, "Now I have been given everything I wanted. There is nothing else that I need."

He died peacefully some days later. The family wanted to bury him on their own land, which is permitted because their farm is deep in the countryside. His sons made the coffin and lined it with white linen. Then they carried their father from the bedroom into the kitchen and put him into the coffin. My mother had prepared the *kolliva* and came herself, and we all held candles as we sang the Orthodox funeral service. There was a gentleness and nobility about this man, a natural piety.

RTE: Wonderful. Do you think that there are aspects of Scottish character and culture that are aids in coming to Orthodoxy? And are there particular challenges that native Scots face in converting?

FR. RAPHAEL: The Scots are friendly, warm, community-orientated people; characteristics which make many of them feel at home in Orthodoxy and help them mix easily with ethnic Orthodox people.

One of challenges that native Scots face in converting is often a lack of regular fellowship. In many places our communities consist primarily of immigrants and students who are there only temporarily and therefore these

communities lack the stable basis necessary to provide converts with the continuous support they need.

Another challenge is the misconception that Orthodoxy is only for Greeks, Russians, Romanians, etc, especially where little or no English is used in the services. In mixed communities consisting of cradle Orthodox and converts, I think it is important that English is used as well as Greek, Slavonic, etc., but in such a way as to enrich the liturgical experience of all, rather than exclude.

RTE: Do you find that Scottish Christians have a feeling for their history, particularly their ties with St Andrew, the patron of Scotland, and other early saints? Even secular Scots seem to be very attached to the Saltire, the Scottish flag which portrays St. Andrew's cross.

FR. RAPHAEL: The early church history of Scotland, including pilgrimage sites and place names, point to a Christian culture that was very close to the Christian East: St. Andrew links Scotland with Constantinople, Greece, Russia and Romania. And the Celtic Church's liturgical life and organization sometimes have more in common with eastern Christian communities than western—even the Celtic cross design was found in the Egyptian desert.

Other early Christian saints such as St. Anthony, St. Catherine, St. Nicholas, and of course Sts. Columba, Ninian, and Cuthbert, to mention only a few British saints of undivided Christianity, are well known in Scotland. In Edinburgh a magnificent cathedral and a landmark of the city is dedicated to St. Giles or Aegidius, a seventh-century hermit from Athens.

Many Scots are aware of this connection with the early eastern Church and for some this is an incentive to see Orthodoxy as a tradition which is not foreign to them after all.

RTE: What are your hopes for the future of Orthodoxy in Scotland?

FR. RAPHAEL: I am optimistic. Orthodoxy is the faith and life of the early Church unchanged, the Gospel as it should be practised in our daily life; it attracts those who seek the truth and are willing to apply it in their lives. If this is true for all, it is particularly true for the Scots whose early Christian heritage is so close to what Orthodoxy professes today. Please pray for the Church in Scotland. ✦