

This article was taken from the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) website:

<https://www.oca.org/reflections/fr.-lawrence-farley/windsor-castle-a-change-in-perspective>



Archpriest Lawrence Farley is the pastor of St. Herman of Alaska Orthodox Church (OCA) in Langley, B.C., Canada. He received his B.A. from Trinity College, Toronto, and his M.Div. from Wycliffe College, Toronto. A former Anglican priest, he converted to Orthodoxy in 1985 and studied for two years at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Seminary in Pennsylvania. In addition to the Orthodox Bible Companion Series, he has also published *Let Us Attend*, *One Flesh*, *The Christian Old Testament*, *Following Egeria*, and *A Daily Calendar of Saints*.

February 12, 2020      Reflections in Christ / Fr. Lawrence Farley /

## Windsor Castle: a Change in Perspective

In 1992, a spotlight was left too close to a curtain in Windsor Castle in England, and the heat from that spotlight caused the curtain to catch fire. Before the fire was extinguished, much of the eleventh century castle built originally by William the Conqueror was in ruins, including St. George's Hall and the royal Private Chapel. Repairs, predictably, were quite expensive: it cost about \$61 million dollars to restore (though none of the cost was borne by the British taxpayer). In restoring the Chapel, some changes were made in the stained glass windows, suggested by sketches and notes made by Prince Philip. As one fulsome commentator wrote, "The Royal Family managed to modernize something ancient while retaining its essence, making it even better than before". He was referring some of the images of the stained glass window, which now depicted a fire-fighter aiming a hose at a burning tower, and another image showing a hard-hatted worker moving a painting to safety—presumably the men who worked salvaging and saving what they could from Windsor Castle. The comments that follow are in no way intended as a critique of the Royal Family. But I do think that the changes made in that stained glass window reveal something fundamental about how our age now views religion, and how they document a change in perspective.

Formerly, before the change, religion was viewed as mankind's way of connecting with the divine. When the divine intersected with the earthly, it could be recognized by its quality of holiness. And here it is important to understand what is meant by "holiness". Holiness did not describe a way of behaving, and was not synonymous with good behaviour. Indeed, in primitive religions, holiness had precious little to do with what we call good behaviour. Holiness described a numinous quality (as Otto reminded us), and was not infrequently regarded as dangerous. Holy things needed to be approached carefully, and only after due preparation. The Ark of the Covenant was holy, for example, and when Uzzah forgot this and treated it like any other bit of furniture, he was struck down for it so that he died. It was a part of the Biblical revolution to add ethics into this primitive mix, so that God insisted not only upon reverence when approaching Him, but also upon good behaviour.

In the Christian view of things, the Incarnation of the eternal Logos as Jesus of Nazareth further revolutionized our understanding of religion. Now the holy and unapproachable God dwelt in the supremely approachable Son of Man, and His bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost opened up the way for sinners like to us become holy as well. But one thing did not change in all these

This article was taken from the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) website:

<https://www.oca.org/reflections/fr.-lawrence-farley/windsor-castle-a-change-in-perspective>

revolutions: religion was still mankind's way of approaching and apprehending the holiness of God, and this holiness still set apart the holy from the common and profane.

That is why the interiors of churches are treated differently from gymnasiums or movie theatres: piety will instinctively lower the voice and tread reverently in a church in a way that it will not when in a gym or a movie theatre. No signs saying "SILENCE!" are required for the lowered voice (such as one sometimes sees in libraries)—recognition that the interior of the church is holy will suffice for the moderation of voice without requiring the large sign. In the same way, a sensitive person will treat the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist differently than other common food, and will also treat the Scriptures with reverence. If one needs a book for a doorstep, one would never choose the Bible for that purpose. That is why we call it "the Holy Bible".

In other words, religion used to be all about recognizing and celebrating the holiness of the divine. Images (such as in stained glass) were therefore made of Jesus, of His Mother, of scenes from His life, and of His saints. Now, a shift has taken place, and we also celebrate human achievements, even when these have nothing to do with Christ and His Church. That is why those firemen now adorn the stained glass of the royal Private Chapel. This example of change is hardly unique, for other human achievements also now find their place in Christian artwork and iconography.

Please don't misunderstand: the heroism of firefighters and others may justly be recognized celebrated—just not on stained glass and as Christian iconography, for Christian iconography celebrates the sacred, the presence of holy in the midst of our world. A priest standing at the altar serving the Eucharist may legitimately be regarded as a subject for stained glass; that same priest drinking coffee with his parishioners in the hall afterward may not. There is nothing wrong with fellowship in the church hall, but it is not holy, and iconography celebrates holiness.

We note in all these changes an underlying cultural shift from the things of God to the things of Man, from a hunger for heaven to an appreciation of the earthly. Religion has become increasingly a celebration of human potential, human worth, and human achievement. These human things may and should be celebrated, but this celebration is not the essence of religion, much less of the Christian religion.

Christian religion takes what is human and offers it to God, knowing that only by being offered to God can it hope to become truly human. For our humanity is currently tainted and stained by sin, and in need of redeeming. The Christian Faith offers everyone the good news that this redemption has now come, and the way to God opened up for all. We may now take our sinful human lives and bring them to the holy God, knowing that in Christ He will accept, and forgive, and begin to heal. The firemen helping to save Windsor Castle from fire were wonderful, but the world stands on the edge of a greater and more terrible conflagration. To extinguish that fire, we need not earthly hoses and courage, but the grace of our holy God.