

**Funeral oration for Julian Chrysostomides
by Revd. Dr Joseph A. Munitiz S.J.**

**St Sophia
Greek Orthodox Cathedral
London**

1 November 2008

*... αὐτοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποίημα,
κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς,
οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ Θεός,
ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.*

*For we are God's handiwork,
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared in advance,
so that we might walk in them.*

Ephesians 2:10

You will not have been surprised, as we gather to commemorate and bid farewell to our dear relative, friend, colleague ... Julian Chrysostomides, that I have begun with some words in Greek. Julian was first and foremost Greek. For this she and her family decided to leave Istanbul, her birthplace; for this she spent much of her life in research and teaching; for this she became a cultural ambassadress to represent Greece in this country. She was proud to be Greek, and proud to hand on to others knowledge of the treasures of her culture, particularly those of the Greek mediaeval period, the Byzantine Empire.

For Julian however being Greek did not entail a narrowing of vision. Quite young she came to this country, and she was fortunate to come under the influence of two remarkable women. One was Professor Joan Hussey, the woman who in the first half of the twentieth probably did most to encourage wider knowledge of Constantinople and its history. Julian became her student, her admirer, and almost her right hand. She has left testimony of this in the volume of studies, entitled *Kathegetria*, dedicated to her honour. The second woman was the friend she made earlier while studying in Oxford, Iris Murdoch, now best known as a novelist but in her day one of the leading philosophical minds in Britain. Those of us who were fortunate enough to know Iris as a tutor

can appreciate how these two women, Julian and Iris, felt drawn to each other by their intelligence and their originality of thought, but especially by their deep humanity.

Julian's breadth of vision was not limited to her adopted country. In Italy, Venice, with its unparalleled archives, became a centre for her research. She mastered Italian and Latin as she gained first-hand knowledge of the rich Venetian documents, particularly those connected with the outreach of Greece into Sicily.

So that is our first presentation of this great Greek lady who was prepared to step into the wider world. But let me return to my opening text from St Paul, which seems to me to summarize so well what Julian represents.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

When we think of Julian we probably remember many qualities. In my own case I have to begin with one which may surprise you: her humility. Iris Murdoch remarks in her essays on "The Sovereignty of Good" that humility is probably the virtue that helps us most when we are confronted by death: "The acceptance of death", she writes, "is an acceptance of our own nothingness ...", and she goes on: "Humility is a rare virtue and an unfashionable one, and one which is often hard to discern. Only rarely does one meet somebody in whom it positively shines, in whom one apprehends with amazement the absence of the anxious avaricious tentacles of the self" (p. 103). When I first met Julian she was on the point of launching a new seminar in London on the autobiography of a 13th century Byzantine scholar, Nikephoros Blemmydes. By chance she then learned that I had just published a critical edition of this work, and that I was in London. At once she contacted me and asked me to take over the seminar. I was from many points of view an unprepared newcomer to teaching, whereas she already had many years experience. Yet she was prepared to sit in our group almost as a student, completely without any pretensions. In fact she knew much more Greek than I did, and much more history ... She could so easily have wanted to be in charge and to act the role of the great professor. That was not her way. For truly *we are God's handiwork*.

However, the second quality which soon struck me was her intelligence — which had an incisive quality that was beautiful to see in action. She was prepared to raise questions, and not to be daunted by received opinion. She could have excelled in many fields: I remember her telling me how fond she was of

mathematics. Her grasp of languages was exceptional, as was her knowledge of palaeography.

But I pass to a third quality which was probably the most important: for truly *we are God's handiwork*. Julian had an extraordinary gift for recognizing the values of others, and for encouraging them. So many of her students bear witness to this. She could see what others could do, and she would go to any lengths to help them. It is here of course where she will be most missed, as a great teacher.

At this point I would like to read out for you a letter that Julian wrote to me just a month before her death; it show far better than any words of mine can do, what sort of a person she was:

16 August 2008

Αγαπητέ μου Ίωσήφ,

I have been meaning to reply to your cardsince I received it ... Time is spent mostly resting, though I did correct the final draftof my PhD Student's thesis and a couple of dissertations. Corrections leave you drained! The PhD has very interesting material. It is an annotated edition of the first Ottoman land register of the Peloponnese concerning land given to timariots soon after its occupation. It reveals revenues, crops, light industries, fisheries, etc. ... Aftera breathing space from chemotherapy (liver slightly damaged but now recovered) I hope to start again next week. I am improving, but what remains a puzzle to me is how I could have carried this in my body (lymphatic cancer) and not realized until it reached almost its final stage... John, Magda and Nilolakis are taking wonderful careof me with a young nurse form Poland to look after me!

Thank you for your prayers.

Με αγάπη,

Τουλιανή

Truly *we are God's handiwork*. Another translation of these words is: *Truly we are God's work of art* - his *ποίημα*, literally the word transferred into English as "poem". All who knew Julian will probably acknowledge that she was also a very private person. She did show her affection, but this was in few, carefully chosen, words. And I think we must respect her privacy. Her relations with God were not broadcast. And yet when I think of her, the words that come to mind

are these: “we are God's work of art.” Paul goes on saying: *created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance, so that we might walk in them.* And these words also apply very much to Julian: she was a doer, a person with the gift of making a reality of her thoughts. She had great practical sense. Who would have expected her to launch a major publishing house starting from nothing? *Porphyrogenitus*, born in the purple, like the great emperors of Constantinople. Some might have thought the title pretentious; but humility does not mean petty-mindedness. True humility can go hand in hand with great and noble aspirations. She realized the need for an Institute of Hellenic Culture, and she threw herself, with the backing of Royal Holloway College, University of London, into founding it and raising funds to finance it. In Julian's case, it was as if God had prepared in advance the good works that He wanted her to undertake. She had the magnanimity to recognize those works, and the courage and enthusiasm to undertake them.

And so we bid farewell to Julian, giving thanks for all that she gave to us. Praying to God for her, yes, as we all need God's grace to help us on our way. But aware that she was “a work of art” of God, who did her best to do the works that she felt needed to be done, with energy, with intelligence and with humility.

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κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς.

*For we are God's handiwork,
created in Christ Jesus for good works.*

Now, may she rest in peace.