

THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch

ACTS. 9:26

October-November 2012

In Fifteen Years Time

Those of you who pay careful attention to the British media, especially, Radio, Television and the Newspapers, might have noticed that it is usually unable to deal with religious news very clearly or accurately. We need not be surprised at this; there are many other topics of concern in our world which are reported inadequately or inaccurately. Save for the more considered journals published less frequently, the pressure of twenty-four hours news forces most of the media often to present their stories in a rushed way, lacking due consideration. We need not be surprised, either, by the way in which reporters (usually) misuse religious terminology, misapply clerical titles and confuse notions of religious jurisdiction let alone matters of pure theology. After all, these are complex matters, almost designed to catch out even the most expert of reporters. And, of course, reporters, like most of the British population will themselves have little contact with religion in their day to day lives. My own pet hates, especially noticeable on the BBC, is the way their reporters frequently refer to clergyman. Let's say this ordained person is called John Smith. To the BBC he will be referred to as 'Reverend Smith' - an appalling (American) solecism. One may properly refer to 'the Reverend John Smith' by way of a title. One might properly address him or refer to him as 'Mr. Smith' (Protestant) or 'Fr. John' (Orthodox or Catholic) according to his tradition but not 'Reverend Smith'. This small point, however, serves to indicate the very real gulf that now exists between ourselves and the truly secularised society that Britain has become.

We could of course set out a whole series of pieces of evidence in order to make the point. The reality is that Western Christianity has been on a

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The Slavanye Choir from Minsk Belarus

At St. Dunstan's Church
Tuesday 2nd October
At 7.30pm
Tickets £8 (£5 concessions)

very long march into decline ever since the Reformation. It has been long and slow but its historic roots are clearly theological in origin.

The inelegancy of the type of English, so often heard now on the BBC, might only be a small indicator but it points up a deeper anxiety about religion in general. The current malaise, in my opinion can be traced back to the Iranian Revolution with Islam replacing Communism as the West's villain. Islam, of course, has its own, on-going crisis rooted in its very nature as a theocratic political system focused on the worship of a divine monad. But the West's embarrassment over what to do with religion found its modern springboard in the social and philosophical movement we call *The Enlightenment* of the 18th century.

Though much of modern science and its technological and medical benefits began in this period, at the same time it set Man free from any notion of 'parental control' by the Father God, fondly imagining that we are autonomous and a law unto ourselves. The Enlightenment presented us with the isolated free individual with obligations to none on the one hand or, on the other, the equalised member of the collective, forced by inevitable destiny. Both, of course, produced tyrannies of their kind only too well known from the French Revolution to the Soviet gulag and the Nazi concentration camp.

What we have to remember is that our Orthodox Christian world must appear very alien in the face of the present age. One of the aspects of our faith with which secular world will be very uncomfortable is our quiet but utter conviction that salvation is only to be found in Christ. They would far rather that all religions accepted each for the sake of social cohesion. There is, however, a world of difference between living peaceably alongside those with whom we profoundly disagree on theological matters and being expected to accept their position as *just as true* as our own. The arrant nonsense contained within this idea is obvious. Furthermore, we hold that Orthodox Christianity is both the original and complete form of that faith of which we can trace the historical provenance. Such a notion sits uncomfortably with the notion of everyone finding his own way to truth as long as it *feels* right. Alongside this goes our belief that there is but one and original catholic-apostolic church and that the Orthodox Church *is it*. Yet this offends against the modern doctrine of being inclusive of all, no matter how heretical or contrary.

There is nothing new in any of this; Christianity has often and perhaps we might say, has usually lived in conflict with the prevailing culture, even, at times, in countries that have Orthodoxy at the heart of their history. Contrary to western forms of Christianity that have shown themselves frequently subject to change, Orthodoxy is naturally conservative. The faith and the religious institutions of the West have, at various times in history, leapt in all sorts of directions and have (apart from the Roman Catholic Church) suffered constant schismatic movements. Certain denominations have kept their prime integrity but many others, having been invaded by the prevailing spirit of Liberalism have, as a consequence, recently

suffered severe decline.

Here, however, I wish to state by way of warning, that none of this should make Orthodox Christians feel complacent in the present age. Surveys conducted in 2010 by Alexei Krindatch, a sociologist, show that Orthodox churches in the U.S., including non-Chalcedonian churches, grew by 16% between the years 2000-2010. Compared with Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, American Orthodox have a higher percentage of converts from other faith traditions, and in 2010, Orthodox parishes there grew more in attendance by 18% whilst the heterodox denominations declined. But we need to be aware that this was the result of immigration in the main and the demographic is also aging. (This though might be in line with the population at large.) Bearing in mind that it only takes a decline in religion over two generations to see it disappearing (as is happening to western Christianity) what will become of our children? Remember, their faith will have to survive the British secular ethos entrenched around them in school, college, work and community.

We have two choices: we can either pray God fervently to hasten the coming of his kingdom and save us or we can pray to discern what He would have us do in this age.

Among the areas that Orthodox in Britain might consider, I should like to suggest the following:

- Expand our representation in education and catechesis, especially for the young and for the training of future clergy.
- Overcome the separation of the ethnic groups that, at times, might amount to the heresy of phyletism and work instead wholeheartedly towards one, local Orthodox Church and jurisdiction in Britain.
- Only plant new Orthodox Church communities where no other exists at present to spread the faith as widely as possible.
- Overcome our anonymity, especially in the media and make sure that our presence is known.

There is, of course, an awful lot more; I have not mentioned how we finance ourselves, nor the prevalence of nominal Orthodoxy among those who identify themselves with us but rarely attend church, let alone take up the cross in the ascetic struggle.

All this might or might not be true of our community at St. Dunstan's, we are a young community in all senses. I do, though, remember that when I was priest of the country parish at Athelhampton (before we started the mission in Poole) asking myself, where would we be in fifteen years time? It led to what we have now as I realised that Christianity began in cities and spread outward, not the other way round. It's a hard question but one that all Orthodox in this country might ask themselves: where shall we be in fifteen years time.

Fr. Chrysostom

PRACTICAL SUGGESTION

The mystery of repentance and reconciliation should be a part of the spiritual life for every Orthodox Christian. Fr. Chrysostom normally hears confessions after Vespers on a Saturday evening (around 5.30pm), in preparation for the Sunday Liturgy. It would be helpful if most penitents could come at that time where possible. However, it is understood that for those who live a long way from the church, some confessions can be heard at around 10.15am on a Sunday morning, although this can delay the Liturgy. So if possible, do come on Saturday evening (or by special appointment). We shall have this situation until such time as we have more than one priest!



Have you considered making a regular planned donation for the upkeep of the church? Do you pay tax at the standard rate? You could contribute regularly via the Gift Aid? See Fr. Chrysostom for details.



SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturday's at 5.00pm in the Saints of Britain chapel. Fr. Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards. The *Proskomedie* is served at 9.00am and *Orthros* before the Liturgy at 9.30am.

OCTOBER

Tues 2nd Slavany Choir Concert
7.30pm
Sun 7th 18th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 14th 19th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 21st 20th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 28th 21st after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am [NB Summer time ends - clocks back one hour]

NOVEMBER

Sun 4th 22nd after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 11th 23rd after Pentecost
(Remembrance Sunday) Divine
Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 18th 24th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Wed 21st Entry of the Theotokos



Sun 25th 25th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am



Many thanks to George, Valentin, Andrei and anyone else who did a marvellous job and worked so hard in gardening and clearing the church grounds.

