

THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch

ACTS. 9:26

July August 2014

The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan of Canterbury, Poole
The Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of The British Isles and Ireland
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Whose Values?

The recent 'Trojan Horse' controversy in the public media concerning certain schools in Birmingham, as well as the resulting debate around British values, highlighted in my mind the ambiguities of much public comment. Not only did columnists, commentators and politicians rush to the fore, outlining what these values are; others were quick to enter into dispute. The Prime Minister was quite clear in outlining the importance of a belief in freedom, tolerance of others, accepting personal and social responsibility, respecting and upholding the rule of law.

The problem here is that, for the last thirty to forty years, legislation has appeared consistently to dissolve all these worthy ideals. Though very wary of allowing politics to rear its head in the matters of faith with which we are concerned, I would make it no secret that I am not an admirer of the great European project. Britons, who before lived according to liberties enshrined in law and by the ancient customs of The Common Law, have now been enclosed within the strictures of human rights legislation, defining entitlement over responsibility. In recent years, parliament (for which read, a metropolitan elite) have pushed forward social and attitudinal changes that have increasingly used the very rule of law to undermine the Christian inheritance of this country.

There is, of course, a debate to be had as to how far religious ideas, values and teachings can be part of a political establishment. There are countries which strive to become, according to their understanding,

full theocracies. These, as far as I can ascertain, are all Islamic - a religion whose adherents you will recall, were suspected of having undermined the British nature of the schools in Birmingham. We need, though to be aware that Islam is at its heart a polity: that is a system of government, intended to impose, universally, what they perceive as the rule of a divine monad. This is something that few of the politicians who have permitted large scale Muslim immigration into the UK are educated in. Christianity, I need not remind you, in not a polity; its kingdom is not of this world. Even when the relationship between the State and the Faith of the Apostles was at its most integrated, that is, in the Byzantine Empire, it was never thought that the two were the same, as if Constantinople were the Kingdom of God on earth, *tempting though the idea must have been to some...*

On the other hand, although there is no direct dependence upon being British and being Christian, historically, it has been Christianity (at first, Catholic-Orthodox, then Roman and finally, Protestant) that provided the values for generations of Britons. By the times of Queen Victoria, when religious belief and practice were in evident decline, Christian moral values were still regarded as the respectable or publicly acceptable norm. Yet in the last forty years one can see easily how public attitudes in general have changed in Britain, especially in the area of sexual morality. I have seen in my own lifetime

how matters have altered regarding sex outside marriage, having children without marriage, cohabitation and not least, homosexual relations. What I find almost amusing in a topsy-turvy sort of way, is how public attitudes have flipped over in the last forty years: where once all sexual activity outside of monogamous, heterosexual marriage might be regarded as wrong in some sense, now anyone who might venture to suggest that all this partakes of sin is roundly set upon as a bigot, an antediluvian dinosaur and described (in some bizarre abuse of Greek) as '****phobic'. One might see a parallel in the way the term 'racist' is similarly used.

Yet, even with all this, the hand of God is not hidden in our land. For all its agnostic posturing, its moral openness, its definitions of rights, its centrally controlled and bureaucratic machinations, the EU has brought Eastern Europeans to Britain and they, in turn, have brought with them their faith.

No matter how much wishful thinking the politicians and commentators might indulge in, Islam and its values cannot be integrated into historic British society or politics. Where it might promote elements of public decency much to be admired by us, Islam has only adhered to ideas that were the norm in Britain itself when I was born. At best, certain elements of Muslim social life might serve to highlight how far British values have fallen prey to the whims and foibles of a morally louche London-based circle in both government and the public media, not least the BBC (once the

epitome of honest neutrality). The point is that, for want of a better term, what we might call conservative social values, are ours already in Orthodox Christianity. Despite the obvious decadence of large areas of British social life - prisoners of their own indulgence and addictions and far from truly free - there is still hope of a rediscovery of another Britain, one re-hallowed in its Christian past. This is utterly unfashionable, of course, for the new vales have already spread to the younger generation and to children as well. But even here a benign providence has sent us Orthodox people from Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Greece, Bulgaria and elsewhere and, not least, Catholic Poles. Who knows but for all the creeping side-lining of Europe's ancient Christian religion by the European project in favour of an homogenous plutocracy (the rule of money!) God has cast upon our shores, like the Sower of the parable, many faithful people whose minds are steeped in Christian values.

On the surface, the new European morality appears *like an angel of light*: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Human Rights, Anti-Racism and Environmentalism. But do not be fooled: these are not Christian values. They are ideas founded on the idea of progress, imagining that creating perfect social conditions will naturally result in the perfection of Man. Yet, as we know, without the grace of God, fallen humanity cannot be raised; you cannot bring the perfect out of the imperfect.

Meanwhile, the following data was compiled by NatCen as part of its research for the 31st British Social Attitudes Survey. It shows that the percentage of people identifying as Church of England (Anglican) has fallen from 27% in 2003 to just 16% in 2013, a drop of 59%. The percentage identifying as Roman Catholic has remained

at 9%, while "other Christians" (presumably, including us) account for 16% - up one per cent. The total proportion of the population who say that they are Christian is now 41%, down from 51% in 2003. The percentage identifying themselves with a non-Christian religion has risen from 6% in 2003 to 8% in 2013.

These figures should give us pause for thought on how matters have changed. But they should also make clear to us the clear imperative that in witnessing to our faith, Orthodox Christians, no matter their respective country of origin, are all now missionaries of Christ: our faith, our inner lives, our moral lives, our integrity have to shine out. Whatever brought us to where and how we live now, in the mind of God, our vocation is nothing less than to re-hallow this land; to re-establish the real values that it once possessed.

Fr. Chrysostom

Christian Values in Practice

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centred. *Forgive them anyway.*

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. *Be kind anyway.*

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. *Succeed anyway.*

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. *Be honest and sincere anyway.*

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. *Create anyway.*

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. *Be happy anyway.*

The good you do today will often be forgotten. *Do good anyway.*

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. *Give your best anyway.* In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

No matter who says what about you, accept it all with a smile and continue doing your own work.

Pray together and abide in unity.

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.

JULY

Sun 6th 4th Sunday after Pentecost Orthros 9.30am
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 13th 5th Sunday after Pentecost Orthros 9.30am
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 20th 6th Sunday after Pentecost Orthros 9.30am
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

[Sun 27th No Services -
Fr Chrysostom on holiday 24th -
31st incl.]

AUGUST

Fri 1st Beginning of the Dormition Fast

Tues 5th Eve of the Transfiguration Vespertal Divine Liturgy 7.00pm

Sun 10th 9th after Pentecost Orthros 9.30am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Fri 15th The Dormition of the Theotokos Divine Liturgy 11.00am

Sun 17th 10th after Pentecost Orthros 9.30am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

[Sun 24th No Services -
Fr Chrysostom on holiday 21st -
28th incl.]

Sun 31st 12th after Pentecost Orthros 9.30am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

