

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch

ACTS. 9:26

July-August 2015

The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan of Canterbury, Poole
The Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of The British Isles and Ireland
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

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Orthodoxy and Heresy

The word, Theology, if it means anything, means *speaking of God*. Over recent years, a number of heterodox theologians have attacked the traditional and Orthodox language about God. They begin to call God, *our Mother* and might refer to God using the pronoun, *She*. Some have preferred, instead, to use the neuter gender, talking of the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. There are even, it appears, people who have been supposedly baptized in the name of this neutered God.

This, of course, comes from the restless world of Protestantism but, even with little theological education, it does not take long to realise that this is heretical. The faithful who know the truth and have an anointing from the Truth (1John.2:20-23) react instinctively against this idea, not from mere conservatism but because it has never been part of the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Why this new heresy has arisen today comes, evidently, from the secular spirit that has now, largely been absorbed into western Christianity. Its virtues have, in the main, abandoned the traditional idea of the soul's spiritual development, decrying, instead, the newly invented social and political vices of racism, homophobia, Islamophobia and climate change denial. Also included, of course, is the obsession with equality and from there, Feminism, which leads naturally, to addressing God as *Mother*. Its pursuits and aims are largely millenarian, imagining that with the right systems one might bring about a perfected world. With this way of thinking, it becomes

changing the very language of theology and then to alter the traditional liturgical forms. I need not even mention the re-appearance of female ordination - something found already among early heretics and Gnostic sects of the first centuries AD: funny how there are no new heresies, really, only the re-emergence of old ones. [You might wish to compare, the example, the similarities found in the heretical theology of Arius and the Jehovah's Witnesses who appeared in the latter half of the 19th century in America.]

Our defence against all this is to remain unmoved in our Orthodoxy and to acquire, more and more, the mind of Christ (1 Cor.2:14-16). But having said that, we do not remain silent; we can still use the rational mind to serve our argument against those who pervert the faith of Christ. So, when asked what is wrong in addressing God as *She*, Orthodox Christianity has clear arguments beyond the appeal to Holy Tradition alone.

The first problem for feminist theology is that it has a poor grasp of our understanding - as far as the limits of the fallen human mind allow- of The Holy Trinity. In Orthodoxy, there is a distinction between *what* God is and *who* God is; between the 'something' and the 'someone'. What God is, his essence or nature is divine and, as such, the divine has no sex. In the same way, our nature is human but *human nature* has no sex itself, either. It is only when we speak of particular persons (someone) that we mention male or female.

The same is true in our language of God, our theology. The Divine nature is sexually neuter but when we talk of the three 'someones' who are the Being of the Godhead, we do use the term *He*. This is important because the use of sexual-specific language: calling God *Our Father* for example, points to the truth of Him being a person, not an *It*; not an unspecified force or power but a person in relationship to the *other*. God is indeed the creator, redeemer and sanctifier but God's function(s) cannot be all; that is not all that He has revealed to us. The Creator is primarily also *Our Father*. Neutral machines can make *things* but only an artist can create a work of art with which he has a living relationship. So it is with us and God.

If this is so with 'neutralising' the persons of the Trinity, something equally wrong happens if we replace *He* with *She*. Christianity is unashamedly a patriarchal religion; the masculine term is used as being a default position as, for example, when we refer to all human beings as *Mankind* which includes women as well as men. But *womankind* is, clearly, something specific, a particular sex connected with bringing life into the world through birth-giving. As soon as the feminist theologians apply this to God they have invented their own (dare I call it *ad hominem*) religion. The Holy Trinity is not the *Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit*, not least in its contradiction of the actual Incarnation of God not only as *Man* but also as the specific historical man, Jesus of Nazareth.

Of course there are references within Holy Tradition of female attributes in God's action and love. Christ himself longed to gather the people of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her brood under her wings (Matt. 23:37) But this is the language of analogy and says nothing about the divine persons of the Trinity.

It is argued that exclusively male language about God excludes women - exclusion and making distinctions being, of course, yet another modern vice - despite the fact our foremothers in the faith had no problem with this. The scripture, however, is quite straightforward in saying both male and female are created in God's image; both can be His icon for they are both human by nature and it is our humanity (the 'something' we are) that is made in the image of God: "*So God made man; in the image of God He made him; male and female He made them.*" (Gen.1:27)

So to make God out to be neuter would detract from his being three persons in One Being. God's influence on us is through a relationship with us; it is not the mindless workings of some divine force. Though some, mistakenly, refer to the Holy Spirit as *It* and imagine the Spirit in terms of power and energy, the third person of the Trinity is called *He* and his power comes upon us in as much as we are in Christ and it is the Spirit's anointing that establishes our living relationship with God. God does not magically 'zap' people with power - rather, it is because, passing through the death and resurrection of Baptism, we have a new relationship, a new covenant with our Saviour-God.

So do not be fooled: the post-modern world may well want to recreate its god in *its* own image. But, as ever, we the Orthodox will rightly glorify the God we rightly believe in; that is the meaning of Orthodoxy

Fr. Chrysostom

Future Plans

At the Parish Committee meeting in June, a number of ideas were put forward for discussion that concerned the future life and work of our parish. It would be good if they were generally known and now discussed among the congregation. You might wish to pass on your reflections and opinions to Fr. Chrysostom. They are as follows:

- That our work with the young children be fully organised with their activities linked clearly to the liturgical calendar.
- That we need to consider what regular liturgical services might be served on weekdays, for example, Little Vespers in the middle of the week. This might be combined every so often with a catechetical talk and teaching on the Orthodox faith. This is important as we have a number of possible adult baptism emerging currently from people who wish to become Orthodox Christian.
- That the parish committee should now be properly constituted with formal elections for membership together with the appointment of officers in charge of certain areas of parish life: finance, Safeguarding, work with the young, sales and fundraising etc.

Parents are politely reminded that they should control their little children during the liturgy. Please be sure also that they are not - in their innocence - removing items from our sales table. A number of pens have disappeared recently without payment.

Don't forget to see Oana's beautiful photographs of Met. Kallistos' visit on the 10th June. They can be found on our web site in the photo gallery.

Late News!

Our first metropolitan is to be Archimandrite Silouan Oner. Fr. Philip Hall had been elevated to the rank of Archimandrite. God grant them many years!

SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturday's at 5.00pm in the Saints of Britain chapel. Fr. Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards.

July

Sun 5th 5th Sunday after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sat 11th Archdiocesan meeting in Manchester No Vespers

Sun 12th 6th after Pentecost (Fr. Chrysostom in Manchester)
No Liturgy. Reader Service (6th Hour & Typika) 10.30am

Sun 19th 7th after Pentecost
Fathers of the 4th Ecumenical Council
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 26th 8th after Pentecost
No Liturgy. Reader Service (6th Hour & Typika) (Fr. Chrysostom on holiday)

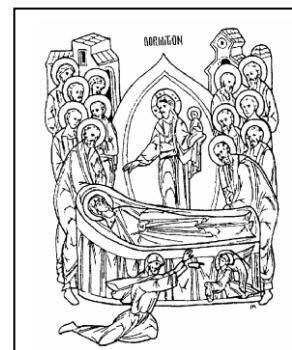
August

Sun 2nd 9th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Thurs 6th The Transfiguration
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

Sun 9th 10th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Fri 14th Vespersal Liturgy for the Dormition 6.00pm



Sun 16th 11th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 23rd 12th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 30th 13th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am