

THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch

ACTS. 9:26

May-June 2014

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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The Creation

All the way through the account of the Creation, the writers of the first chapter of the book of Genesis portray God as saying *let there be...* It runs through the familiar pattern: let there be light; let the waters be gathered; let the earth bring forth; let there be lights in the firmament; let the waters bring forth and so on. But when it comes to Man, He says, *let us make man in our image, after our likeness.* The point is clear: the creation only finds its purpose with us and we ourselves only find meaning in God. In the specific story of Man's creation in the second chapter, God is shown breathing Life into the formed clay. It is this, the text says, that made Man a living soul (Gen.2:7)

Modern science tells us that the origins of the universe are such that the slightest variation in the physics would mean that we would never have evolved at all; there appears to be, from the moment of the Big Bang, what we might call the Anthropic Principle - that, from the beginning of time, space and matter, our appearance is made possible. The story in Genesis, of course, is not science in the current sense nor is it intended to be. At one time, up to the time that Copernicus demonstrated that the earth orbited the sun, science, or *natural philosophy* as it was called, were integrated, especially in the western Christian mind. But at that time, all human culture was integrated: religion, knowledge, art, politics. But that is no longer possible; these have since split apart into separate

endeavours and seem at best to be neighbours with little to say to one another, if not in conflict, especially in the popular mind. It is easy for people today to dismiss what they imagine the religious mind believes about the natural world and how it came about as a mere just-so story belonging to a bygone age.

There were attempts in the last two centuries by religious thinkers to interact with scientific knowledge as it expanded. But this only left religious ideas in retreat as more and more discovers pushed out the boundaries of science, leaving a 'god of the gaps' to explain what was, as yet, unknown. None of this, of course, has much bearing, historically, on Orthodox Christian thinking. Not least because Orthodox Christians had been too busy just surviving under the Ottoman Yoke or separated by geography, to have much time for the personal dispute between Galileo and Pope Urban or for coming to grips with the theories of Charles Darwin.

The integration of all human culture has its attractions but is unlikely to be revisited again by religious and scientific philosophers. Orthodoxy is not fundamentalist, so we are not in conflict with science. And we cannot just react to science, as human knowledge advances: the god of the gaps just keeps on getting smaller and smaller. In short, the Orthodox approach to the relationship between faith and science is rather that of independence.

The initial problem is in the popular confusion between two very different concepts: The Creation of the World on the one hand and the Origins of the Universe on the other. Like the builders of the tower of Babel later in the book of Genesis, there appears to be a *confusion of tongues* in the way that these ideas are popularly used - here origins and creation are not the same things. The scientific pursuit of the origins of something is concerned with asking the question of *how* a current phenomenon came about; what produced its form. The writers of the Book of Genesis were not concerned with this. They asked, rather, *why* are we here; what mind conceived our creation and for what purpose. We might consider an analogy to make this clearer. We could take, for example, the painting, the *Mona Lisa*, probably the most famous works of art in the world. If we were to analyse its origins we could trace its history; we might investigate the pigments used to make the colours, how they were made from natural sources; we could outline its composition, the use of perspective, even try to psychoanalyse that enigmatic smile. This would define its origins, how it came about. But these parts are not its creation; the creation of the painting was not the sum of its parts - the creation was in the mind of Leonardo Da Vinci. The origin and the creation of a work of art are not the same thing. So it is with the scientific and religious understanding of the world. Although the way in which science

is pursued and used is a moral question, science itself is morally neutral, it is just knowledge. Our faith, however, must ask different, independent questions: though Man is created a living soul, Genesis portrays us as cast out of Eden, separated from the Tree of Life and subject to death. The one creature, different from all others, who can ask questions about his existence, his origins and his Creator, is yet a dead soul, having lost the likeness of God. Indeed, even the questions that we, generally, are able to ask can cause perplexity because we see things only through our *fallen eyes*; our vision is inadequate. This is why our faith has been revealed by God, it is not something that we have just worked out for ourselves. As St John says in his first epistle: God loved us first so that we might love Him and one another. (I Jn. 4:9-11)

For this reason our faith is presented to the world as *The Gospel*, good news. Having just passed through Great Lent and experienced once again the paschal mystery, we have reiterated what happened to us when we were baptized. Our dead souls have been reborn even in the midst of this one life that we have been given.

We are soon to celebrate Pentecost (8th June), re-echoing what happened to us when baptized and chrismated. Just as in our creation God breathed into Man a soul, so at Pentecost, the divine person of the Holy Spirit himself made his abode in us. We were sealed for life eternal. In other words, as in the old Adam we were lost, in the new, we are made alive (1 Cor. 15:22). At Pentecost green vestments and hangings are used; greenery is traditionally brought into church. The green symbolises Life. Our knowledge, our questions, our understanding is not about biology or botany or zoology, they about theology - God-Talk,

something we can do because we are living souls; because *in the beginning*, in our creation, God breathed into us.

Fr. Chrysostom

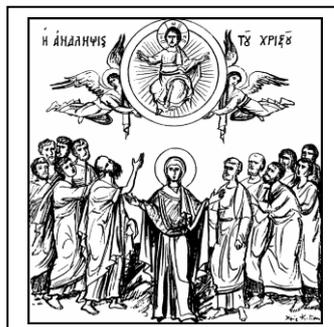


Archdiocesan Conference

The original Antiochian Orthodox Deanery was recently elevated to become an Archdiocese, alongside others in Northern and southern Europe. The annual conference this year will therefore be the first as an archdiocese but as yet we have no metropolitan archbishop appointed by the Holy Synod of Antioch. It is hoped that this will be done by June or July. The conference at Swanwick in Derbyshire on 26 - 28th May will be attended by Fr. Chrysostom, accompanied by Reader David and Michael Ambrose from the congregation. Naturally, much of the conference will be devoted to the future form and life of the archdiocese and to making provision, not least financially, for a new metropolitan whoever he shall be. Please remember the conference and our representatives in your prayers.

A Gentle Reminder

Would parents of small children please ensure that they are not running about the church during the Liturgy due to the disturbance caused to worshippers and, not least, to the choir as they lead the singing.



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.

MAY

Sun 4th 3rd Sunday of Pascha
The Holy Myrrhbearing Women
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 11th 4th Sunday of Pascha
The Paralysed Man
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 18th 5th Sunday of Pascha
The Samaritan Woman
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 19th St. Dunstan of
Canterbury, Patron of the Parish

Sun 25th 6th Sunday of Pascha
The Blind Man Divine Liturgy
10.30am

Thurs 29th Ascension Day
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

JUNE

Sun 1st 7th Sunday of Pascha
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 8th Holy Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 15th 1st Sunday after
Pentecost All Saints
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 16th Beginning of the
Apostles' Fast

Sun 22nd 2nd Sunday after
Pentecost All Saints of Britain
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 29th 3rd Sunday after
Pentecost Holy Apostles Peter &
Paul All Saints of Antioch
Divine Liturgy 10.30am