

THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch
ACTS. 9:26
APRIL-MAY 2012

The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan Poole-Bournemouth
The Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of The United Kingdom and Ireland
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East
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EQUALITY VERSUS LIBERTY

During The First World War the French commander, Ferdinand Foch, led the Ninth Army's counterattacks at the Battle of the Marne (1914). In one of his battlefield reports from the Marne he wrote: *"Hard pressed on my right; center is yielding; impossible to maneuver. Situation excellent, I shall attack!"*

The sayings of great military commanders can often be a source of inspiration in any adversity and the marshall model has often been applied to the spiritual life. St. Paul used such imagery in his own writings. [see, Ephesian 6:10ff., for example] Furthermore, one could be excused for thinking that, the way that General Foch described his situation, might well be applied to the situations in which Christian find themselves in contemporary western societies such as Britain. A number of recent decisions in our Courts of Law appear on the surface to be direct attacks upon the freedom to practise an openly religious life. This is of particular interest as the grounds for such judgements have usually been in the area of human equality. In other words, the right to secular equality is of greater legal weight than the right to practise ones religion and its traditional moral teachings. The recent court cases are well enough known without me having to rehearse them here: suffice it to say that the focus on equality (being of the *same worth*) is particularly interesting. Of the three concepts that emerge from the French revolution of 1789, Liberty, Fraternity and Equality, it comes last. It is an intriguing question for

any thinking persons: which do they regard as higher, Liberty or Equality? I know which I would answer!

One issue, however, has, of late, really set the religious-freedom-cat loose among the equality-pigeons, to coin a phrase. Being 'hard pressed on the right and the centre yielding', a number of leading churchmen in Britain have boldly attacked, like General Foch on the Marne. And it has been at least amusing to see how secular opinions, including *The Times* newspaper, have seemingly had their feathers ruffled by robust Christian assaults on their cherished nostrums.

The issue at hand, of course, is that proposed by the current coalition government, though not by any popular demand: homosexual marriage. I have written on this before in respect of developments in the Lutheran Church of Sweden and I do not wish to repeat myself here. Instead, apart from making the Orthodox Christian position abundantly clear, I should like to examine this matter from the perspective of our of own spiritual approach to life. I should also like briefly to examine the moral role secular law plays in our national life.

Firstly, then, homosexual marriage is impossible within Orthodox Christianity; no such union could be blessed by the Church. Revelation and Tradition teaches us that sexual activity, whether heterosexual or homosexual outside monogamous, heterosexual marriage, is sin. My

own feeling is that, despite the weasel-words about consulting on this matter, the current government has already made up its mind; Unless it proves politically (N.B. not *morally*) dangerous, this change in 800 years of matrimonial law will go ahead. The worrying thing that might follow, apart from the other social consequences, is the inevitable pressure that will be placed on the established Church of England to conduct such sham marriages. (Don't forget, there will be a number of Anglican clergy, following the lead of Liberal Jews and certain liberal Protestant denominations, who will be delighted with the idea.) Will this prove the thin end of the wedge - will there eventually be legal pressure on other religious bodies such as ourselves? Will teachers lose their positions because they refuse to follow this line in their social and ethical teaching in schools? The government spokesmen assure us that this change in the legislation will not be forced on churches, so why do I not believe them? They've done it already with Catholic adoption agencies with regard to the placing of children with homosexual couples.

Secondly, with respect to our spiritual approach to life, we can see in this issue a clear division between us and those who have been taken in by the secular view of life. This view is entirely anthropocentric, that is centred on Man. This Man, product of the European Enlightenment, now supposedly come of age, autonomous, unshackled and free from any attachment to tradition,

almost god-like, made after his own image, can construct a new morality founded upon the idea that all things, all perspectives, all values are only relative, save for equality, the only thing that matters, even should it trample liberty underfoot.

Our view, on the contrary, is theocentric, centred on God and perceives that everything about us here has its destiny in eternity, not in time; that the choices we make here reveal that we are on the narrow path to heaven or the wide and easy road to hell. Quite naturally, this focus of ours on the mind of Christ, sets us in opposition to the current proposal.

We have to remember here that marriage in Church is taking something that starts off naturally, which is then transfigured in the kingdom of God - it becomes one of the mysteries (sacraments). Marriage, in Orthodox Theology, is an icon of Christ, the bridegroom with his bride, the Church. Husband and wife have the vocation of living this mystery on earth, children being the fruit of their love. How can homosexual couples share in this vocation? Can Christ marry Christ; can the Church be united to the Church? Can they produce children (apart from artificially and adulterously, outside the so called 'marriage')? Do you see how homosexual marriage is impossible in Orthodoxy? Just a woman cannot be ordained priest (can she be the icon of the bridegroom at the liturgy?) neither can there be such a thing as homosexual marriage in Orthodox Christianity. In both cases this is not a matter of equality at all but of symbolic- that is real, Truth.

Finally, we might ask what is the role of secular law in our national life; how far can Law make people morally right before God? The obvious answer is, they cannot; no more than the commandment of Moses not to kill or not to commit adultery can gain your entrance into

the kingdom of heaven on their own. You will recall how Our Lord extended the commandment, dealing with the root of the problem in the passions of anger or lust in the heart. [Matt.5:21-30]. But righteousness and sanctification is not the function of statute law. At its best, however, the law of the land can order society to the common good and will at least, in its civilising role, order the ways of unruly men. Laws are for the evil not the good. They can also educate and set a moral climate conducive to the public good and even improvement. Think of how the laws concerning the wearing of seat belts in cars or those against smoking in public places, have changed attitudes over time for the better. But think also of how those permitting virtual abortion on demand have had a weakening effect on the sanctity of life. I fear, in the current climate, that the present government will have its way over changing the whole meaning of the word 'marriage' to the point where (as with Humpty Dumpty) it can mean whatever we say it means, ad hominem. The utter strangeness of this novel concept of marriage is already being manifested in countries that have brought in homosexual matrimony. They cannot change what we know to be true about marriage in the Orthodox Christian faith but step outside the bounds of our mystical body of the Church, and the societal understanding of what a marriage is will be beyond recognition. What will be the consequences for the raising of children (given the ready availability of artificial conception)? What about the eventual demand for polygamy or polyandry - why will these be excluded? Like General Foch, our situation is impossible, so lets attack!

Fr. Chrysostom

Sign the Coalition for Marriage petition at: www.c4m.org.uk

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* and *Orthros* are served before the Liturgy at 9.30am

APRIL

Sun 1st 5th Sunday of Gt. Lent
Orthros 9.30am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

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GREAT & HOLY WEEK

Sun 8th Entry of Our Lord in Jerusalem – Palm Sunday
Confessions in preparation for Pascha can be heard before any of these services or by appointment with Fr. Chrysostom.

Mon 9th and Tues 10th Orthros - Bridegroom Service. 6.00pm

11th Gt & Holy Wednesday

Anointing Service 7.00pm

12th Gt & Holy Thursday

Celebration of the Mystical Supper
Vespereal Liturgy of St. Basil 11.00am
Orthros - Twelve Gospels 6.00pm

13th Gt & Holy Friday

Royal Hours 9.00am

Vespers of the Shroud 4.00pm

Orthros (Lamentations Service) 6.00pm

14th Gt & Holy Saturday

[Vespereal Liturgy of St. Basil at the College, Cathedral Close, Salisbury]

HOLY PASCHA

Midnight Office, Rush Procession, Orthros and Divine Liturgy of Pascha 11.00pm

Sun 15th Sunday of Pascha

Vespers of Love 2.30pm

Sun 22nd Thomas Sunday Orthros

9.30am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Baptism 12.30pm

Sun 29th Sunday of the Myrrhbearers Orthros 9.30am

Divine Liturgy 10.30am

MAY

Sun 6th Sunday of the Paralytic Orthros 9.30am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 13th Sunday of the Samaritan Woman Orthros 9.30am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 20th Sunday of the Blind Man Romanian Liturgy 11.00am (unless announced otherwise)

Thurs 24th Ascension of Our Lord

Sun 27th After Ascension Orthros 9.30am Divine Liturgy 10.30am