

THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch
ACTS. 9:26

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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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Family Values

If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows. [1 Timothy 5:16]

I start this time with a verse from St. Paul's first letter to Timothy. It might seem a curious little verse, a mere detail referring to widows and, what might be called in modern parlance, the duty of care. It appears from this little text that towards the end of Paul's life, the early Christians were organised enough to establish a system for the enrolling and care of widows. They appear to have been an 'order' within the body of Christ alongside the sacred orders of Bishops, priests and deacons; together with those, later on, defined as sub deacons, readers, exorcists and doorkeepers.

Paul clearly has in mind that the Church, as a body, has a duty in charity to care for those recognised as true widows: those who have no children or other relatives to care for them. However, he states that those widows with living relatives should be cared for by them; the duty devolves to the rest of the family, not the Church. We have to bear in mind that the Roman Empire had no system of social support save for the occasional imperial grant of relief following a natural disaster and the regular supply of 'bread and circuses' for the poor.

If we were to transfer this apostolic thinking to the social and political realm we might draw out a clear moral principle, that in the first instance it is the natural family that *should* care for its members. Although, as you know, I assiduously avoid making ideologically political comments in these columns, it strikes me that this principle has largely been forgotten in the countries of Europe where the social democratic model prevails. In Britain in particular, you will have noticed, there has been a marked reaction to the government 'cuts' in social provision. The very idea that a government can no longer afford to

keep many of us in the manner to which we have grown accustomed seems to appal. The fact is, whoever is to blame, the current recession and financial crisis means the necessary money just is not there.

Bearing in mind also St. Paul's assertion that [2 Thess.3:10] 'If anyone will not work, let him not eat,' we might ask how dependent many of our fellow citizens have become on The State to a degree that they derive little support from their relatives and even lose any sense of self-reliance.

Clearly, churches have always been charitable institutions in themselves, with the organised relief of suffering in many forms. The apostle, however, does not envisage that the Church should be used to provide a living for those who are perfectly capable of looking after themselves *or* have relatives on hand to provide the necessary care.

There are, of course, those churches that provide a living for their pastors, so that they can give themselves full-time to their ministry. And there are charitable bodies under the auspices of churches that provide necessary relief and help in all sorts of fields. But the principle remains: that *every family in heaven and on earth that takes its name from The Father*, [Ephesians 3:14-15] has the natural care of its members. There is an innate sense in all human beings that we should be concerned for our relatives under normal circumstances. Apart from dysfunctional families, we will tend to value our nearest and dearest more than people outside our own. There is nothing wrong in this for we are emotionally attached to them in a way that should not in any way, of course, exclude charity towards strangers. Charity, as they say, begins at home and, moreover, begins in the home, in the sense that one of the social functions of the family is

to teach us how to love others. The problem is an interesting one, however, in modern Britain: how far has the encroachment of the all-embracing welfare state begun to usurp the naturally role of the family and encouraged people to become mere clients of the state whilst denigrating the moral influence of the family? This is not to say that social security provided politically, has not had an enormous impact on levels of real poverty in this country since the Second World War. But at the same time, there is always the law of unforeseen consequences. In other words, the moral effect has been a general decline in the social role and the received importance of the family.

This, in part, has been one of the causes in the breakdown of family stability in Britain. In short, we exist in a society at the heart of which there lies not a social, financial, political, educational or cultural problem *but a moral one*.

The social changes that have happened since the War, really became evident with the 'new morality' that emerged in the 1980's. Parties of every political colour have largely accepted these changes and it has resulted in a new relationship between many of our fellow citizens and the state. In short, they have become not citizens but clients. In the ancient Roman world when a master granted freedom to a slave, the ex-slave (*libertus*) remained under obligation to his former master; he was now his client (*cliens*), dependant on him for help when necessary and still expected to support, perform tasks and take the side of his *Dominus*. This kind of relationship is now mirrored in our own society between the socially dependent and the state. Where once, their obligations were, firstly, towards their own families, it has now migrated towards the Department of Social Security.

Evidently, there are people whom the government in our name

must help. In any civilized society, especially where government is of, by and for the people we should expect assistance for those whose families cannot cope; there are clearly times when difficulties are beyond the limits of the family and we must draw on the benefits of being part of a wider society. This was St. Paul's point in respect of widows.

So as Christian people, what are we to make of all this? How should we evaluate the state in which we find ourselves in the light of Holy Tradition?

I think that the answer must be one of intense regret that political and socially trends have largely sidelined traditional marriage. All the subtle and gradually changes that have nurtured the alternatives: elected single-parenthood, the promotion of homosexuality, the easy facilitating of divorce and more than anything, the creeping ubiquity of the all-embracing and all-providing State - have resulted in the able-bodied but atomised and socially isolated client-citizen, utterly dependant on state hand-outs. I need not point out that this is not the redeemed human dignity to which Christ has called us. Yes, there are genuinely ill, disabled, widowed, homeless, unemployed or disadvantaged people whom the state must assist through our taxes. But to surrender our sovereignty as human beings to a human institution renders us less than *plebs*, subservient to a power of our own devising, rather than servants of the living God. What is not surprising, of course, is that this socio-political model, so common in Europe now, has begun to collapse through the peculiar alchemy of economics and the resulting fall-out of the banking crisis. Governments all over Europe are being forced to re-adjust the relationship with their citizens now. As this happens, our witness to the sanctity of sacramental Christian marriage and the natural bonds of family life, might once again be heard, pointing a way to a higher vocation for Mankind beyond the modern death-cult of hedonism, celebrity and dependency.

Fr. Chrysostom



Latest News

At the time of printing, we have now established **The Bournemouth-Poole Orthodox Christian Foundation** and have just opened a bank account with LloydsTSB. We have just deposited £5,000 and await registration with the Charities Commission. Once in that position, we should be able to purchase our new building.

The Foundation itself has as its Directors Presbytera Olympias, Mark Nash, Gildas Méal and myself. It will be, essentially, a management committee for the use of the building but with clear charitable aims:

1. To promote the Orthodox Christian religion
2. To provide a place of worship for St. Dunstan's Antiochian Orthodox Community.
3. To preserve the former St. Osmund's church building as a place of architectural merit.
4. To provide meeting facilities for the local community (church hall).
5. To assist the integration of Orthodox Christians from abroad into British Society.

The current parish committee will, of course, still exist and continue to organise and plan for the life of the our church community. It will need funds to meet its own costs and pay the regular donations we make to the maintenance of our Deanery and the Diocese. The Foundation will be more concerned with raising money and applying for grants in order to further its charitable aims. We will need to discuss, therefore, very practical matters: for example, into which account money from collections should go. At this stage, I envisage that people who wish to contribute regularly to the Foundation will register as 'members' and if they pay tax, we will be able to recover that (an addition to our income at 26%). Furthermore, we will be to applying for grants from various bodies for the required repair programme, though we shall have to be realistic in these straightened times. But like I said in my article, the first obligation of care devolves on us as a church family.

SERVICES

NB Time AND place of the services will probably change. These will be announced. Once in the new building, the Liturgy will probably be at 10.30am preceded by Matins at 9.00am

DECEMBER

5th 28th Sunday after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

12th 29th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday of the Forefathers
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

19th 30th Sunday after Pentecost
Commemoration of all the Righteous

24th Fri Eve of Nativity Royal
Hours 9.00am Orthros 8.00pm
Divine Liturgy of the Nativity
9.00pm

25th Sat The Nativity of Our Lord
26th Sunday Synaxis of the
Theotokos NO SERVICE - Fr.
Chrysostom on holiday

JANUARY

2nd 32nd Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday before Theophany Divine
Liturgy 11.00am

6th Thurs Theophany of Our
Lord

9th 33rd Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday after Theophany Divine
Liturgy and OGreat Blessing of the
Waters 11.00am

16th 34th Sunday after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

23rd 35th Sunday after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

30th 36th Sunday after Pentecost
The Three Holy Hierarchs
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

