

# THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch

ACTS. 9:26

January-February 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

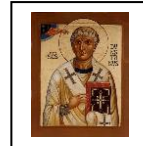
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## The Laws of Nature

C.S. Lewis was a popular writer of fiction for children. He also wrote on religious themes for adults and became a stalwart defender of and apologist for Christianity during the middle years of the twentieth century. One of my favourite books by him is a short monograph called *The Abolition of Man*, a piercing and critical analysis of the aims of education as set out in the 1944 Education Act.

Lewis, having been an atheist, became a convert to Christianity *after* experiencing the horrors of the First World War. This is interesting in itself, when others might claim that it is the experience of evils that makes them question the very existence of a beneficent and almighty God.



C S Lewis 1898-1963

I recently came across an intriguing idea of his regarding miracles which, to my mind, helps to elucidate and clarify exactly what we mean by the term 'miracle' and also to see their place of the miraculous within what we call in Orthodoxy, the economy of salvation.

Lewis' contention is that far from challenging the Laws of Nature as popularly understood, miracles actually affirm their necessity. In other words, if it were not that our universe were governed by clear logic, measurable phenomena and fixed laws ordering the processes of nature, then miracles could not occur; miracles, as it were, depend upon the laws of nature for their existence. It sounds counter-intuitive, as they say but picture the following scenario.

You go into your hotel room and leave behind one hundred pounds, then go out for the evening. When you return, the money is still there. You do the same the following evening, leaving an additional hundred pounds in the room. When you return, you would expect to find two hundred pounds still. However, arriving back at your room this time, you discover that there is only fifty pounds left. The question for you is either, that the laws of mathematics have suddenly changed whilst you were out (i.e. 100 plus 100 now make 50!) or, more likely, that the laws of England have been broken. Of the two possibilities, it is the latter that seems more reasonable and that you have been the victim of theft.

The point being, of course, is that for something actually to be miraculous, then there must be the presumption that nature's laws have been superseded and not some other rational explanation within those very laws.

Apart from the healings and other such actions recorded

in the gospels, the life of Christ presents us with two happenings that require our acknowledgement that of nature have been interrupted. One, being the resurrection that we celebrate at Pascha; the other, that which we are currently celebrating: the virginal conception and incarnation of Our Lord. Indeed, both events are part of our symbol of faith, the Nicene Creed and are fundamental to the faith expected of anyone who identifies themselves as Christian and wishes to be considered a member of Christ's body, the Church. In the case of the virginal conception for example, we know and understand the natural laws regarding biological reproduction. Indeed, any such *parthenogenesis* to use the proper term, must result in the mother giving birth to a female, such are the genetic laws. But St. Luke and St. Matthew beg to differ in this case. Indeed, the whole Apostolic Tradition demands that we accept the breaking of the laws of nature here for this is the action of God. The phenomenon is a sign of His intervention; a stepping into our history by the one from whom the natural laws themselves have their very origin. In other words, if we would but believe, given that this really happened, it can only be evidence that the laws have been broken. The laws are necessary, they have to be there, otherwise, they cannot be broken and no 'sign' is given.

Clearly, the Laws of Nature have to be fundamental, that means they have to be there at the very start of time. There is only one logical, mathematical and

rational system in our universe and it has been in place for the last 14 Billion years. The alternative, that the laws developed with the universe, would not work: nothing could exist with any stability if the whole system of physical laws were not already in place. And, moreover, those very laws determine what follows from the very start of time and space. In other words, it is clear that God must have 'front-loaded' the creation and known what would result rather than, (as many might wrongly imagine) intervene to 'guide' things along. The fact that this creation resulted in a creature with a brain sufficiently conscious and rational enough not only to understand the rational universe and moreover, seek to know and worship his Creator, is proof enough that what scientists call *the big bang* was so calibrated so as to result in us! If the force of gravity were greater or less; if the rate of expansion of the universe were faster or slower, *we* would not be here, nor, for that matter, asking the question as to *why* we are here.

This is the so called 'anthropic principle' - the idea that all things lead to us in this creation, as in the Genesis story: Adam is put into the garden as the one who has dominion, the steward of God who names the animals, making sense of all around him.

The problem is that mankind, made in the image and likeness of God, is over-fond of trying to make a 'god' of his own image. This is bound to be an idol, for whilst retaining the image, we have fallen and have lost the likeness of God: all approximations made in the image of the current man cannot be gods at all. Still, for all this, there is an emptiness in the soul of man that makes him contemplate the need for something spiritually fulfilling. All cultures and traditions have expressed this; that somehow, something or someone has to be placated by incantation, sacrifice or

veneration. Yet no matter how sophisticated or spiritually focused, fallen man cannot repair himself and recover that access to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22f). All human attempts at self-perfection whether religious, political or physical, (as in the current pursuit of immortality through the medical science of embryology) are destined for failure, given the natural laws within which we exist here. For this reason, God Himself has sought us out. Adam first, He sought in the garden, even when he hid from God when he had learned to his cost the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:9-10). As we have recently commemorated, our philanthropic God pursued mankind in the holy forefathers of Christ. Then, in his own time, He was born among His old people and sharing our nature, made us able at last to recover what we had in the beginning in the mind of God. To this end, God was born of a virgin, breaking in past the natural laws to make clear the sign: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." (Matthew 1:23). In the New Testament miracles are described as acts of power or as signs. Clearly, when he lived among us, Christ, firstly from compassion, healed the sufferings of those who came to him but even these were signs declaring who He was. That same power and compassion is still among us, there in the sacramental life of the Church. So, as long as time continues and the Laws of Nature endure, so the philanthropic God will still break in to seek out the lost souls. *Fr. Chrysostom*

## 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.

## JANUARY

Sun 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Theophany Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing of Waters 10.30am

Mon 6<sup>th</sup> The Holy Theophany

Sun 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Theophany Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 19<sup>th</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost Sunday of the Ten Lepers Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 26<sup>th</sup> 31<sup>st</sup> after Pentecost Sunday of Zacchaeus Divine Liturgy 10.30am



## FEBRUARY

Sun 2<sup>nd</sup> The Meeting of our Lord (Candlemas) Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Publican (Beginning of the Triodion) and the Pharisee Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Prodigal Son Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Last Judgement (Meatfare) Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 24<sup>th</sup> Meat-Fast begins (Cheesefare Week)