

THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch

ACTS. 9:26

July-August 2013

The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan of Canterbury, Poole

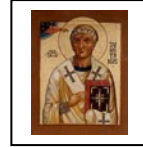
The Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of The United Kingdom and Ireland
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

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Landmarks

'You shall not remove your neighbour's landmark, which the men of old have set, in your inheritance.'

So says the Book of Deuteronomy (19:14). Later on, it pronounces a curse on the one who does so. It might be an obscure portion of the commandments in the Torah but it is, of course, concerned with settling boundary disputes between people and the establishment of rights over land, necessary within any civil society.

I mention this, however, with reference to a spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament Law often found among the Fathers of the Church. If we lay aside for a moment the literal application of the text, what might its spiritual and saving purpose be? It is to remind us that no individual is the measure of everything; that all we do is in reference to and respect for others and that there are boundaries, especially moral ones, that we cross at our peril. Like people walking along a cliff, we are wiser to keep to the set path, rather than wander too close to the edge.

It is obvious to any Christian observer and especially to us as Orthodox, nourished within the bounds of the Holy Tradition of the Apostles, that a landmark has recently been removed in the life of this nation. I am referring to the recent votes, both in the Houses of Commons and Lords, to prepare the way for the legalisation of homosexual marriage. That this

particular landmark should be removed I am not, I must confess, terribly surprised. After all, it is all par for the course, as we say, in the great secularisation project at work in Western countries over the last fifty years. Whereas before, it was assumed in Britain, that Christian values were, on the whole, the accepted moral norms for society at large (even if only observed in part) now, with the victory of what we might call *the adolescent mind* over our political class, it is assumed that all previous landmarks should be torn down and strange new boundaries set.

It is clear from recent conversations that I have had with various members of the congregation who have come here from abroad, that a certain level of shock is expressed by the idea of homosexual marriage; the native born British just seem to exhibit a resigned gasp of exasperation as they realise the inevitable. That this novelty is being foisted on the British public by a government that - in part - bares the epithet *conservative*, is especially ironic. The political drive behind this idea, of course, originates within the minds that move the European Union but it is particularly irksome to hear voices from within British Christianity giving support to the nuptial recognition of homosexual relationships. In particular, I am thinking of a bishop of the established church (the elegant spire of whose cathedral stands not fifty miles from us!) who tells us that to deny homosexuals

marriage is to practise a kind of sexual apartheid. Leaving aside the arrant silliness of the remark, it clearly gave great offence to many black Christians whose fellows from the continent of Africa had suffered under that system. It is, incidentally, usually a sign of weak philosophical argument whenever someone likens an idea to any previously existing horror. Here, they are usually scraping the bottom of the barrel in a vain attempt to contradict you. Yes, my Lord Bishop of XXXX, to deny homosexuals marriage, as Orthodox Christianity certainly does, is indeed discrimination *but that is the point*. For there is discrimination and discrimination; there is prejudice and there is truth. In politics we might discriminate sinfully on the grounds of race yet, on the other hand, we might discriminate properly in an area like the Arts, for example, on the grounds of educated taste.

It is evident to anyone brought up within the Judaeo-Christian traditions that the scriptures record a revelation concerning the relationship between the sexes: that what we observe in biology is the intention of God *from the beginning*; that what has generally been the pattern and norm of one man and one woman, is indeed the paradigm of what we mean by the word *Marriage* - all the aberrations, whether polygamous or cohabitation, notwithstanding. Even ancient Sparta, where homosexuality was virtually compulsory, saw no obvious need to institute homosexual marriage. Apart from being an exclusive and

politically private relationship between two people of the same sex, what possible interest did society at large have in it: it could not produce children, so what would be the point of legal recognition. In other words, it cannot be a marriage. The fact that they would have to resort to sperm donation and surrogacy to 'have a child' (not entirely their own) rather proves the point.

The current Archbishop of Canterbury recently compounded the general confusion at large in his speech at the debate in the House of Lords when he said that homosexual marriage was not a faith issue but one that attacks the social good. It is evident to anyone grounded in the Holy Tradition of Orthodox Christianity that it surely is a matter of the Faith. As set out in the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians, marriage is a mystery (sacrament) where the man is a symbol of the bridegroom, Christ and the woman a symbol of the bride, the Church; that a blessed Christian marriage is, therefore, a living icon of that relationship. It is evident that Christ cannot marry Christ and the Church cannot marry herself. In that we hold that that which is created by God always points beyond, towards the spiritual realities, so marriage, although a great social good, nevertheless among us has a higher, mystical purpose: revealing in the world the union of heaven and earth, a very sign of the kingdom of God itself. Clearly, homosexual marriage cannot do that and this is not bigotry, nor prejudice, nor apartheid: this is Theology, the word of God.

Mr. Cameron's government may well succeed in bringing in this legal novelty and we shall politely accord it as much acknowledgement as if parliament had decreed that words should mean whatever they say they should. After all, they might eventually accord the same degree of equality in this matter to

polyandrous and polygamous marriage. One thing, however, is fairly certain - it will serve as yet another stage in the secularisation of Britain and the tearing up of her Christian roots. Evidently, the landmarks are being removed.

Fr. Chrysostom

One of the charitable causes you might wish to consider helping is the Deanery Fund supporting the victims of the present Syrian crisis. The monies are distributed via our Patriarchate on the ground. Cheques may be sent directly to the Dean, Archpriest Gregory Hallam, 29 Willis Rd., Cale Green, Stockport SK3 8HQ. Please state that the donation is for the Syrian Appeal. Cheques should be made payable to: The Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of the UK & Ireland.

A Request

Would parents of small children please make sure that their little ones do run along the side aisles during the Liturgy as this disturbs the concentration of the choir.

Cards

Don't forget that when buying greetings cards for friends and family, we still have a large stock for all occasions and very, very competitive prices. All money goes to the Foundation in order to keep the building open.

Icon Exhibition

Once again, we shall be hosting an exhibition of icons by the Romanian iconographer, Simona Tudor. She will be running master classes for anyone who wishes to learn the art of painting on glass (£40 fee). The Church will be open to the public between 20th - 28th July, times to be announced. Volunteers needed!



We shall be hosts once again to The Western Rite Vicariate of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia for a Liturgy on Saturday 20th July at 11.00am. All welcome. See Gildas for details.



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 9.0am and *Orthros* before the Liturgy at 9.30am.

JULY

Sun 7th 2nd After Pentecost All Saints of Antioch Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 14th 3rd After Pentecost Fathers of the 4th Ecum. Council All Saints of Britain Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sat 20th Western Rite Liturgy 11.00am (Fr. Thomas ROCOR) Start of Icon Exhibition

Sun 21st 4th After Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 28th 5th After Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am*

August

Thurs 1st Beginning of the Dormition Fast

Sun 4th 6th After Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Tuesday 6th August The Transfiguration Divine Liturgy 11.00am

Sun 11th 7th After Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Wed 14th Eve of Dormition Vespers Divine Liturgy 7.00pm

Sun 18th 8th After Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am*

Sun 25th 9th After Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am*

*Listen for announcements: Fr. Chrysostom *may* be away on holiday (yet to be arranged) on one or two of these Sundays.