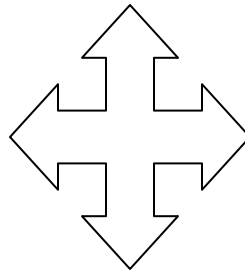


THE NARTHEX



February-March2006

The Newsletter of the Orthodox Church of Parkstone, Dorset

The Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of

The United Kingdom and Ireland

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

[The dedication and patron saint of the church community is yet to be decided]

The Way of Life

In 1873 an ancient Christian document called *The Didache* was discovered. Written in Greek in 1056, scholars generally agree that it is a copy of an ancient teaching manual coming from Syria around the end of the first century AD. The *Didache* begins with the two ways of existence open to mankind: the way of life and the way of death. What is interesting about the way that leads to spiritual death is how contemporary it seems.

Human nature has not changed and the same passions still disfigure the good instincts planted within us:

"In it are murders, adulteries, lusts, fornication, thefts, idolatries, witchcraft, sorceries.....who lie awake planning wickedness.....they care for nothing good or useful and are bent only on their own advantage.....Knowledge of their Creator is not in them; they make away with their infants and deface God's image..."

Perhaps with a little imagination we can recognise the post-modern obsessions with the new age and the occult; all forms of sexual indulgence outside heterosexual marriage; the readiness to abort the unplanned baby; the willingness to use extreme violence or terror to achieve perverted ends; the denigration of all that had been held sacred.

The dichotomy of the two ways has been brought into sharp focus in our own day. Nothing could be clearer for Christian people now than that we

are living within a time that has given rise to a culture of death. What, however, is so invidious is that (true, as ever, to the subtlety of the Evil One) the culture of death so often appears to the undiscerning as a way of light. This is of course a demonic and beguiling delusion. Under the appearance and guise of justice—or the modern fixation on *rights*—enormous shifts in social attitudes have removed the fundamentally Christian assumptions from our public life.

The contemporary dilemmas of modern medical ethics are case in point. We have developed more and more technological ways of preventing the inevitable in the name of preserving life—that is, biological existence and function—and yet at the same time are on the verge of political decisions that would legalise euthanasia. Medical technicians can legally destroy harvested embryos, discarding them as waste after genetic experimentation or IVF treatment, whilst at the same time aborting the foetus from the womb when its life is 'inconvenient.' At the one end we waste the life of the disposable, unborn embryo, only to try and find cures through gene therapies at the other. Does it sound cannibalistic? What will we do with these genetically perfect human specimens, resistant to all known disease who might live indefinitely? In pursuit of this goal they create a living hell. This too is part of the culture of death and it is not our way.

Need I mention the abolition of God-sanctified marriage which appears almost like a project for successive governments, certain social engineers and commentators. Every public sexual taboo having been subtly removed, only one is now left: that of pederasty. Do you think it will be too long before even 'they' demand the right to exercise their perverted preference? If you think it fanciful that any society would tolerate such an idea, you have only to turn your eyes to the ancient Graeco-Roman world when the *Didache* was written. This too is part of the culture of death and it is not our way.

In the matter of religion itself our age is noted for its iconoclasm. From our own government we have witnessed farcical attempts to make 'incitement to religious hatred' an offence alongside the continuous secularisation of the nation state. The disparaging of Christianity is as old as the Church herself; this is nothing new to us and so we turn the other cheek and our apologetists can answer anything the world can throw at us. Yet at the same time much of the media and the whole liberal establishment does not know how to stand up against the volatile and immature reactions of Muslim fanaticism—*Continued from the front page:*) -ics whose world-view cannot

cope with living with the concept of freedom of expression. Yet, at the same time, an age with no faith is rife with superstition, neo-paganism and all the paraphernalia of the New Age and the occult. With this alongside the new 'scientism' (which would reduce human experience to the mere material, natural laws,) no wonder people are confused. This too is part of the culture of death and it is not our way.

There is no need to call up materialism, commercialism, globalisation, the destruction of the natural world and all the other paradoxical situations that mark out the hypocrisy of our age: on the one hand, terrified of death (the final taboo) and yet unable to find the way that leads to the Life we know in Christ, this culture of death was all there in the *Didache* 1900 years ago. There are interesting parallels with that age and our own but as then, so now: we as Orthodox Christians are called upon to reject the way of death and find the way that leads to life.

In saying this it is more important than ever that we hold together as a worshipping community. As we build a new parish life here it must be evident to those around us what exactly we stand for, what we believe in, what we hope in. Orthodox Christianity is not just conservative family values in oriental clothing; it is something far more dynamic than that. The same Christ who blessed the wedding at Cana with his first miracle also said that the pursuit of the kingdom of heaven was more important than family or possessions. Family values are good and are highly important but in our understanding of the Christian faith marriage and family take on a new dimension. You can find natural family love and loyalty in any religion and where there is none. The marriage blessed by the Church, however, becomes sacramental—it symbolises the union between Christ and his Church. Here, the natural is transfigured into a mystery, pointing beyond itself. These ideas have been largely forgotten within the post-modern and de-sacralised Western world. Easy divorce and serial-monogamy, the current substitutes for Christian marriage, are an attempt to find happiness in relationships. Like all forms of martyrdom—witness—Christian marriage is costly and demands selflessness from both parties. With the loss of faith within our culture, it is natural that *religious struggle* becomes increasingly meaningless alongside the secular pursuit of self-possessed happiness. This too is part of the culture of death and it is not our way.

On the contrary, of course, the *Didache* also outlines the Way of Life. This means essentially, that our life and faith are integrated; that we be people of integrity. In other words, that the life and witness we build here

in the Church is reflected in the way each of us lives and relates to the world around us. It means that we be Christ-centred; that the Christ we encounter in the Church, in the Liturgy, in the mysteries, in the Scriptures, in one another—becomes the guide and the goal of all we endeavour. This is indeed the way that leads to Life.

Fr. Chrysostom

SERVICES

FEBRUARY

Sat 11th Vespers 4.30pm

Sun 12th Beginning of Triodion Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee
Orthros 9.00am Divine Liturgy 10.30am Visit of our Dean, Archpriest
Michael

Wed 15th Paraklesis 6.00pm

Sat 18th No Vespers

Sun 19th Sunday of Prodigal Son Orthros 9.00am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Wed 22nd Paraklesis 6.00pm

Sat 25th Vespers 4.30pm

Sun 26th 30th Sunday of the Last Judgement. Meatfare Orthros 9.00am
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

March

Wed 1st Paraklesis 6.00pm

Sat 4th Vespers 4.30pm

Sun 5th Expulsion of Adam. Cheefare Sunday Orthros 9.00am Divine
Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 6th **Beginning of Great Lent**

Wed 8th Little Compline and Canon of St. Andrew of Crete 6.00pm

Sat 11th Vespers 4.30pm

Sun 12th First Sunday of Gt. Lent. Sunday of Orthodoxy Orthros 9.00am
Divine Liturgy of St. Basil & Procession 10.30am

Wed 15th Little Compline 6.00pm

Sat 18th Vespers 4.30pm

Sun 19th 2nd Sunday of Gt. Lent

St. Gregory Palamas Orthros 9.00am
Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 10.30am

Wed 22nd Little Compline 6.00pm

Sat 25th Vespers 4.30pm

Sun 26th (BST begins) 3rd Sunday of Gt. Lent. Ve Veneration of the Cross
Orthros 9.00am Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 10.30am

Wed 29th Little Compline 6.00pm