

THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called
Christians at Antioch
ACTS. 9:26
MAY - JUNE 2007

The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan Parkstone, Dorset

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

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CHANGING

The essence of the purpose of the Christian religion is to be found in change. Anyone who believes that they have encountered Christ and has not been changed has not encountered Christ. This change, however, is **not** just a moral reformation: "*I was a sinner but now I'm a saint*"; nor is it just a change of life-style: "*I'm committed to going to church on Sunday mornings now.*" The change implicit in the Christian faith (and in particular, the Orthodox understanding of it,) is something far more essential - to do with what it means actually to be human.

Unlike any other religion, the Christian faith seeks to transfigure human nature itself in order that we might be reconciled and enabled to commune with God. It is in realising that we are made in the image (icon) of God [Gen.1:26ff] that we discover that we have lost the 'likeness' of God. It is the recovery of that very 'likeness' which forms the content of our spiritual endeavour; our very aim is to become like the One who for our sakes became like us for our salvation. As the Fathers often put it: 'God became Man that Man might become *god* (divine).' Hinduism aims at the final release of the soul (Atman) from rebirth and its return and absorption into God (Brahman); Islam can only impose the submission of the human will

a totalitarian monotheism with no change in the human essence. Judaism still follows the Torah (The Law) which can only serve to highlight the fact of our *un*-likeness with God and cannot, of itself, perfect our nature. [Rom.8:1-11]. In other words, Christ is the only source of our true salvation [Jn.14:6]: we can have no part with those, particularly in politics, who seek to minimise the role of Christianity in the West - promoting the multi-cultural illusion that all religions are really the same (i.e. *untrue*) and of equal use and value - because they are not.

The religious history of Britain can, of course, be viewed from various perspectives: the old liberal (Whig) historians saw it as one of progress from superstitious Papism to enlightened and reasonable Protestantism. However, their 'project' (if we may call it that) has proceeded to advance through industrialisation, empire, decline, secularism and materialistic hedonism. An Orthodox understanding of this history can see and accept the fact of these gradual movements yet will hesitate to see it as necessary 'progress'. Indeed, most historians recognise that the very idea of liberal progress in human affairs began to dissolve on the battlefields of 1914-18. From our perspective, change in British religious history has been in the form of a steady decline in the spiritual lives of

the peoples of these islands. For us, this began with the Norman conquest of 1066 and the gradual isolation of the Orthodox spiritual patrimony which once flourished here among the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon churches. Of course, evidence of that tradition still linger, even to this day, often hidden like pearls in the old country and folk customs of this land; still clinging on like lichens to the old rocks.

Yet our contention is that this is not the end of the story; something new yet old has started to blossom in this land. It is significant, perhaps even a sign that we, as a congregation worship in a building once dedicated to the western (post-schism) saint Osmund, a man specifically employed by the Conqueror to assist in the process of removing all traces of the old Anglo-Saxon (i.e. Orthodox) church and spiritual tradition, substituting the new Papalism. Now though, a new patron, one who, (now in heaven,) once toiled by the grace of God to establish that older understanding of the faith. St. Dunstan (f.d. 19th May) once again toils with us, praying for us in our spiritual struggle. And once again, the essence of this struggle is *change*; not the old liberal idea of political advance through factual knowledge but through a supreme paradox: change for us is found in a revolution *through tradition*.

Change for us is a return to our real origins. If this is true for us as individuals and in our own spiritual experience, then it is also true of our place in history. Orthodox Christianity re-emerged in Britain from the 17th Cent. onwards. Slowly and in fits and starts, it has been replanted here. To be honest, it is still at a very delicate stage of growth. If we may continue the analogy, we are still in the green house and not yet in the garden. Most Christians in this country and certainly, most people in general, know nothing about us and certainly do not realise that we hold the ancient treasure that once belonged to their forefathers.

Our spiritual lives are all about change. We struggle by repentance to regain our primal purity and communion with God. From what our human nature (essence) has become we are journeying back to that humanity created in the image and likeness of God. Change for us is returning to what we were intended to be by our creator. The very same must be true of our very mission in this land: the re-hallowing of Britain of which I have often spoken, is our agenda. The Gospel itself, remember, is news – something new and yet, it is old. There is a delicious irony in that we, the most ancient, the most traditional, the most old fashioned of all bodies called churches, we the Orthodox are the true promoters of change. There is nothing new under the sun, says the book of Ecclesiastes [Eccl.1:9] and that is true of this world. But the Gospel is not of this world, it is not a philosophy, a system, an analysis or a form of self-help psycho-babble. As the famous Anglican, Dean Inge, once remarked: *'The Gospel is good news, not good advice!'* The good news, as expressed in the parable of the Prodigal Son we heard before Great Lent is *'Come home, all is forgiven'*.

As well as endeavouring to

save our own souls, we are here also, in the first place, to call the English people back to the roots of their own national identity. The origins of the English as a nation is a complex business; as a bloodline (genetics) it is quite ambiguous but nationality is more than just tracing a line of descent [Mat.3:9!] The fact remains, the Church here is an older institution than the Monarchy itself; it was a Christian identity that established the nation, not the other way round. Is it no wonder that there is so much political and social ambiguity and even anxiety around the concept of English nationhood (as others, like the Scots, assert a measure of independence) Having gradually lost their religion, the English have begun to lose their very soul.

Having been through all the pages of their history: reformation, enlightenment, empire, decline and secularism, the idea of absorption into a European superstate and globalisation do not appear too attractive, perhaps.

Yet it is in this very *Areopagus* of ideas (see: Acts 17:19) that we preach change in Christ, the Good News of the kingdom of God according to the original Orthodox faith of their fathers. This change, however, is different. Who knows, perhaps in times yet to come, later historians will talk of another great movement alongside the Reformation, the Enlightenment and The Globalisation – *The Restoration* of Christian England and the rediscovering of what was once hallowed in this land.

Fr. Chrysostom

SERVICES

Usual weekday services:

Wednesday: Sixth Hour & Typika 10.00am Friday: Sixth Hour & Typika 10.00am

MAY

13TH Sun 6th of Pascha The Blind Man Orthros 9.00am

Divine Liturgy 10.30am

16th Wed Eve of The

Ascension Vigil (Vespers & Orthros) 6.00pm

18th Fri Eve of St. Dunstan

Vespers 6.00pm [*Wed & Fri fasting begins again!*]

19th Sat Vespers 6.00pm

20th Sun 7th of Pascha

Orthros 9.00am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

26th Sat Vespers 6.00pm

27th Sun Holy Pentecost

Orthros 9.00am Divine Liturgy 10.30am

[*Fast-Free Week!*]

JUNE

2nd Sat Vespers 6.00pm

3rd Sun 1st after Pentecost

All Saints Orthros 9.00am

Divine Liturgy 10.30am

4th Mon Beginning of

Apostles' Fast

9th Sat Vespers 6.00pm

10th Sun Second after

Pentecost All Saints of

Britain Orthros 9.00am

Divine Liturgy 10.30am

16th Sat Vespers 6.00pm

17th Sun 3rd After Pentecost

All Saints of Britain

Orthros 9.00am

Divine

Liturgy 10.30am

23rd Sat Vespers 6.00pm

24th Sun 4th after Pentecost

Nativity of St. John the

Baptist Orthros 9.00 am

Divine Liturgy 10.30am

29th Fri Saints Peter & Paul

Matins and Typika 10.00am



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