

THE NARTHEX

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

August-September 2008

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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Intruding into Private Grief?

There is an idea that God cannot possibly have a sense of humour: being omniscient he knows everything, anyway and therefore must know the end of any joke before it is told. Well, be that as it may, if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans! No doubt, we have all had the experience of long held hopes and dreams finally being dashed, of being disappointed in our aims and ambitions. The team that makes it to the final, only to lose; the long-coveted position that is awarded to another; the carefully worked out plan which is eventually rejected - all are common human experiences and if they come upon us too often, we can begin to become morose and despondent.

When such bitter disappointments afflict us in our spiritual lives, there is an obvious opening for the devil. The temptation to doubt the providence of God or even to doubt God himself is not far away and at the very least, we have questions naturally arising in our hearts: why was this prayer not answered; why did this friend not recover from the illness; why did this disaster befall these people?

A case in point is the Ecumenical Movement among Christians of the western traditions. It is true that our Eastern Orthodox churches have been involved and the Roman Catholics have been active in a variety of ways. However, ecumenical discussions to bring about the visible union of all who

believe in Christ are hampered by two things from the start: different understanding of the meaning of Christian theological concepts as well as different understandings of what the term 'unity' itself involves.

I remember very well, from my Anglican days, the excitement at the prospects of the establishing of inter-communion between our national church and the Roman Church. The late 1970's and early 1980's seemed a positive time for such hopes. These were, of course, to be sadly dashed with the ascendancy of liberal theology within the Anglican corridors of power and influence.

The real problem for the Ecumenical Movement is that it is founded on the completely Palagian idea that we can construct our own 'super church'. [Palagius, you might recall, was a British heretic of the 4th- 5th centuries who taught that we saved ourselves by our own efforts alone, without grace.] This raises severe difficulties for Orthodox thinking, holding clearly, as we do, that the Church already exists; we don't have to construct it. What happened to that Church spoken of the New Testament, the one founded by Christ on the Tradition of the Apostles? The answer is easy - *it is we, ourselves*; it hasn't gone away and won't until Christ returns in glory. Holding, as we do, to a direct line of succession in our ancient patriarchates to churches founded by the apostles themselves (- Antioch the second oldest after

Jerusalem!) it begs the question, what do we need ecumenism for? Well, in the first place, we the Orthodox must be one-in-Christ and, in fact, we know that we all hold to the same theology and stand firmly on Holy Tradition. We have, though, been accused from time to time of the heresy of Philetism - the false idea of basing the unity of a church on political, cultural or racial principles. Indeed, there are no national churches in Orthodoxy, only *local* ones. The aim of the Orthodox in the UK must, eventually, be to have but one jurisdiction in a local British Orthodox Church, serving all Orthodox believers in these lands. For the time being we can be glad that in our own Antiochian jurisdiction in this country we have believers of all nationalities, though the largest group might well be English. In our own congregation, for example, just under half our people have English as a second language. So, if we are involved in ecumenism at all, it can only be as witnesses to what we are - as Orthodox, not as working to build something different.

For myself as an ex-Anglican, I must confess to mixed feelings when I look across to what has happened to the ecclesial body that first brought me to faith in Christ. Both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Vatican have made it clear that the recent decision of the Church of England to proceed with the ordination of female bishops

has placed yet another barrier in the path of mutual understanding and any faint hopes of repairing eucharistic communion that might still remain, have now clearly died. The current battle that is raging in world Anglicanism and has so delighted the media, is, of course, a fight not between orthodox and heterodox believers but between liberals and conservatives - at one level it is not an argument that concerns us and I feel awkward in many ways that I should be prying into 'private grief'. But something very important struck me the other day regarding the established church; a change which was, in some ways, hidden there all the time. I read an article on 'women bishops' recently in the *Daily Telegraph* [editorially in favour]. It was a one-sided article involving an interview with some typical Anglicans. What I noticed was that the interviewees in their replies clearly thought that their faith must accommodate the changing mores of contemporary society and that it should concern itself with solving the political problems of the planet. In other words, these people were not 'religious' at all, they were completely secularised. Their affiliation was to an institution whose 'usefulness' was to be judged entirely by human standards rather than according to an idea of divinely revealed truth. Sadly, it raises the question as to whether we have anything in common with them at all. A few Anglicans, as with women priests in 1992-94, will leave and will find their way to the Roman Church. This will at least take them back to the branch from which they were cut off but will not join them once more to the root of the faith. When I left the Church of England in 1994 it was not to continue Anglicanism elsewhere; it was not conservative chagrin at the changes being made: it was because I had realised that there can only be one Church of Christ and I had

discovered where that was. Neither was this a sudden decision, for this was also the result of nearly twenty years study and contact with the Orthodox Faith and Orthodox people.

In one sense, however, what has befallen the national church does concern us all, for it represents the further decline of religion in these islands and the steady advance of the secularisation of Britain. It could be, before too long, that religion itself will be merely a sociological phenomenon among insular groups; in other words, something that immigrants 'do'. With the Church of England dwindling to a mere appendage of the political constitution, brought out on state occasions, it will be interesting to observe what happens in particular to the respective sizes of a) the Roman church and b) the Muslim community. What I fear is a continued fragmentation of our population by group, in certain areas of the land.

What I hope has become clear is firstly, how important immigration from traditionally Orthodox lands has been for Britain, for nothing else but Orthodoxy will re-hallow this land in the faith of our ancient forebears. Secondly, we all need to be aware that the unity of all the Orthodox here is essential, if we are to have any effect at all; national/cultural isolation and any trace of Philetism can have no place among us. What we are called towards is a vision of one jurisdiction, an Orthodox Church of the British Isles, indigenous and serving the needs of all who would come to Christ to find salvation.

Fr. Crystostom

"For the Unity of the holy churches of God, let us pray to the Lord."

Lord, have mercy.

SERVICES

N.B. Services might have to times altered or be cancelled during August to take account of holidays. Announcements will follow.

AUGUST

1st Beginning of the Dormition Fast
 3rd 7th Sunday after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.45am
 5th The Transfiguration Vespertal Divine Liturgy 7.00pm
 10th 8th Sunday after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.45am
 14th The Dormition Vespertal Divine Liturgy 7.00pm
 17th 9th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.45am
 24th 10th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.45am
 29th Beheading of St. John the Baptist - [Fast Day]
 31st 11th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.45am

SEPTEMBER

1st Church New Year
 2nd Annual General Parish Meeting and council elections 7.00pm
 7th 12th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.45am
 8th Nativity of the Theotokos
 14th 13th after Pentecost The Exaltation of the Holy Cross
 Divine Liturgy 10.45am [wine & oil]
 21st 14th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.45am
Enthronement of Met. John in Paris
 28th 15th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.45am

