

# THE NARTHEX

January – February 2020  
'And the disciples were first called  
Christians in Antioch' (Acts 11:26)

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## Wake Up!

Since 2008 there has emerged an apparently new form of activism called the 'Woke' movement. Apart from the tortuous and peculiar grammar involved here, another reason why we might be suspicious of its aims is that it has emerged from the Left, and I do not mean just because it has come from the west of where we are in Britain, i.e. across the Atlantic, in America.

All sorts of media are fizzing with its ideas, and like the ridiculous LGBT alphabet spaghetti (to which so many of our institutions have mindlessly surrendered any pretence of rationality) the 'Woke' movement has similarly required that it be taken seriously by serious people.

On the surface the movement purports to attack historical abuses, whether in connection with race, sex or colonial and cultural misappropriation. A 'Woke' individual, for example, would be able to 'call out' (to use the jargon) the British mercantile class of the 16th and 17th centuries for their role in the Atlantic slave trade and thus, by inheritance of guilt, the current wealth creators of modern Britain, and even the entire (white) population who have benefitted from such wealth. 'Woke' thinking demands that reparations be paid.

Apart from the problem of apportioning compensation in any just way, to whom exactly would such reparations be paid; how would they be assessed; how far back do we go? The idea also ignores the role of Britain in ending the slave trade, both through popular movements and in Parliament, and the service and sacrifice made by British sailors in the royal Navy who patrolled the seas to prevent the trade from 1807.

From our Orthodox perspective the more one examines the idea of being 'Woke,' the more it appears as a re-emergence of Gnosticism, albeit a secular form. A perfect example here is Transgenderism, where the individual, like the initiates of ancient cults, passed through a series of stages, even ordeals, to achieve a state of enlightenment, or being woken to a new reality. One thing Gnostic cults held

in common was the disparaging of created matter, into which the soul of the initiate had been trapped by an evil archon or demi-god. The aim, through the acquiring of secret knowledge, was to awaken the soul, so that it could transcend the vile body and ascend to its proper place. This sounds so much like the thinking behind the Trans-agenda, where the individual can select a *gender* according to their own mind and regard the actual biological sex of their body (in which he is 'trapped') as a mere delusion.

It is ironic that much of this has ridden on the back of Feminism, a movement which now finds itself at odds with Transgenderism: if being a woman is now a matter of one's choice among many, what becomes of the grievances and inequalities over which so many women have complained historically?

Many political and social movements flounder over their own inner contradictions, but there is something else occurring here, I think. When seen in wider perspective, not just in terms of the contemporary world but also, in regard to human history and development, are we seeing the beginnings of our own decline as a culture?

Back in 1934 J. D. Unwin, an Oxford anthropologist, published a book called *Sex and Culture*. (Would it have been published as *Gender and Culture* today?) Following the study of eighty-seven different cultures, including historical ones, Unwin presented the idea that cultures and societies that observed strict moral norms around sexual behaviour tended, eventually, to advance both technically and artistically, whereas those that removed the moral boundaries began to stagnate and disintegrate.

Now it would be easy to criticise much of Unwin's thinking. He was, like many intellectuals in his era, a follower of Freud; he was not able to explain why, exactly, there might be a connection between sexual continence and culture; there could be many other causes cited as the reason for a culture's demise or arrested development.

Whatever the case, one could be forgiven for observing our own times and wondering seriously about what is happening to us. In fact, the history of

Britain reveals great fluctuations in what might be called accepted mores and ethical norms. If we take the example of sexual behaviour, around 1650 only one per cent of births were known to be illegitimate. Of course, having children born inside the institution of marriage is one of Unwin's factors for a creative and advancing society. By 1800 however, the percentage of children born outside wedlock had risen to twenty-five. Perhaps, (following Unwin) is that why we did not produce such great composers in the Baroque period as continental Europe? Even Handel, after all, was German! By the way, did you know that, apart from helping to finance the Foundling Hospital for abandoned children, Handel also invested money in the Slave Trade? What do 'Woke' activists make of that? How hard it is to judge the mores of our forebears.

As I have quoted before in respect of these changes to the social mores: 'Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark,' [Deut.19:14], or again, 'remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.' [Prov.22:28] There are clearly serious questions which we, as Christian people, must ask ourselves, especially when we inquire as to the end these changes are meant to achieve and, closer to home, what will be the effect produced in our own children by this social tampering?

In one sense all this need not concern us; we are not here to prop up Western society for its own sake. If there were grandeur and nobility in ancient Rome, its slow political, military and moral collapse only meant that the Church, and especially the monasteries, became guardian to the concept of *Romanitas*, not least in the *New Rome* of Constantinople until its fall in 1453.

But we will only be unconcerned, we will only stand firm, if we are very sure of our faith, if we know our faith, if we take the confrontation that is bound to come our way, as gradually, all the ancient landmarks are kicked over, pulled up and removed. I am not going to

waste space rehearsing media stories that describe the contortions and, frankly, ridiculous situations already produced by the 'Woke' agenda in our schools, hospitals, prisons and even the changing rooms of our shops. I can only suggest that they provide an enormous amount of comic relief as activist and official, authority and campaigner, tie themselves in knots! The problems will arise, however, for those less committed, those on the fringes of Orthodoxy, those beguiled by dreams of human utopias, still waiting to be won by the warriors for social justice.

The recent political history of Britain has, no doubt, helped bring these matters out into the open; there appears to many a real generational divide in our society. Of course, such divisions are as old as the hills: youth and enthusiasm against age and experience. But I suspect that the real fissures are to be found elsewhere. What I think is being undermined (and has been since the end of Second World War) are notions of patriotism, local identity, belonging, duty, tradition, history, Law, order, respect and respectability. This is especially true of the English as the nationality that dare not speak its name. The substitute on offer is the globalist agenda of identity selection, the demise of the nation state, guilt and forced reparations, constant innovation, consumerism and the centralised control by an unelected elite.

The Orthodox might be forgiven for thinking that this all points in the direction of general western apostasy from Christianity, or perhaps eventually, something even more sinister [see: 2 Thess.2:1-4]. What an irony that the 'Woke' generation might one day really wake up and find that with their sexual incontinence, abortions and childless partnerships, they have been outbred and replaced by the followers of the Man from Medina.

In the end our faith, Orthodox Christianity, is not dependent upon a particular nation or culture, and not even a particular set of social mores. There is no country which is the home of Orthodoxy, for our homeland is heaven; there is no language to learn in order to become Orthodox, save to speak the truth in love; there is no form of dress that identifies us as Orthodox, save that, being baptised, we have put on Christ. We may leave the 'Woke' individuals to their agenda: for us, there is but one way to be awake and that comes from being *in Christ*, the Light that enlightens all coming into the world. The wisdom of the world may well make us aware and alert to the injustices and harm that we inflict upon each other but ultimately, the price of true freedom, preserved by eternal vigilance, is that which comes through wakefulness and sobriety, guarding our own souls. For sinners to be awake over the sins of others

begins to smell of hypocrisy, wiping sawdust from the eyes of their ancestors and their children, whilst a whole stick is poked in their own.

It is among the greatest spiritual joys in the Church to be able to celebrate the present feast of the Theophany of Our Lord. Originally observed, together with the Annunciation and the Nativity in one single feast, by 336 AD the Nativity was a separate observance at Rome. All three, now of course, have their own day: the 25th March for the mystery of the conception of the Christ child, hidden in the womb of the Godbearer; 25th December for His first appearance and revelation to a few at Bethlehem; 6th January for the showing forth of God to the world at the River Jordan. Each feast thus presents the revelation of God incarnate in Christ. It is the receiving in faith of this mystical knowledge that forms the true enlightenment of the soul, the understanding that *all* have fallen short of the glory of God (rich and poor, great and small, imperialist and conquered, male and female) and of being awake to the fallen nature of the human condition. Our problems may be manifested in societal structures, history, politics, economics and relationships, but their causes are rooted in Sin and our estrangement, before redemption, from communion with the Life-giver.

No matter how simplistically or profoundly, these things were known in the past, our whole Western culture was built upon them since the collapse of the old Roman world. Christianity itself, adopted by St Constantine the Great, certainly replaced the old order, the old landmarks. So, when the imperial city fell to the Visigoths in 410AD many were inclined to blame the abandonment of the old gods and the adoption of Christianity. In response, the Latin father, Blessed Augustine of Hippo, wrote his great work, *Civitas Dei Contra Paganos*, known in English as, *the City of God*. In it he argued that the opposite was, in fact, true; that Christianity had glorified the empire. And despite the sacking of the imperial city, what really mattered was attaining the kingdom of heaven, the true, eternal city. The centuries that followed vindicated Augustine's view in terms of European cultural achievement, even if fewer people today appreciate, in a more godless, diverse and actually fragmented and dispersed culture, the source of its former greatness. The epitome of that is the late Pope John Paul II pleading with the European Union to include reference to Christianity in its constitution in 2003 and being rebuffed.

Unwin's analysis of sexual mores might be too convenient, an easy target to blame. But whatever the case, I do not feel at ease when I think of our children's future. But then I can call to mind that for anyone in Christ, there is a new creation. [2 Cor.5:17]

*Fr Chrysostom*

## SERVICES

*Vespers is normally served on Saturdays at 5.00pm and on Wednesdays at 6.00pm.*

*(Please enter by the side door)*

*Fr. Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards or by appointment.*

*Orthros is served before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at 8.45am*

## January

Sun 5th Eve of Theophany Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing of Waters 10.30am



Mon 6th Theophany of Our Lord

Sun 12th Sunday after Theophany  
30th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 19th 31st after Pentecost Sunday  
of the Ten Lepers Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 26th 32nd after Pentecost  
Sunday of Zacchaeus Divine Liturgy 10.30am

## February

Sun 2nd The Meeting of Our Lord  
33rd after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 9th Beginning of the Triodion  
Sunday of the Publican & Pharisee  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

## Fast Free Week

Sun 16th Sunday of the Prodigal  
Son Divine Liturgy 10.30am



Sun 23rd Sunday of the Last  
Judgement Meatfare Sunday  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

## Meat Fast Week