

THE NARTHEX

JULY-AUGUST 2021

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

The Orthodox Church of St Dunstan of Canterbury, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset BH14 9JG

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland. Archbishop: Metropolitan Silouan
The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Patriarch: His Beatitude, John X

Parish Priest: Fr. Chrysostom Tel. 01202-602628 email: fr.chrysostom@icloud.com
Asst Priest: Fr Filip Tel. 01308-868543 email: frfiliploommaert@gmx.com
Parish web site: www.saint-dunstan.org Archdiocesan web site: www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk



RES PUBLICA

From an historical perspective the Orthodox Church has always existed within the political world; *res publica*, political things, have always been in the background in the experience of our religious life. St Paul was aware of this when writing to the Romans, *'Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.'* [Rom.13:1-2] There is a sense here that, civic life, as it had developed, was a blessing, bringing protective order to people's lives. The question, of course, is what are the necessary limits of that order? There is also in chapter thirteen of the Epistle to the Romans, the clear concept of political authority as 'coming down' from God Himself. This is an idea with very ancient roots indeed, found in the god-pharaohs of ancient Egypt dynasties, through to the Roman emperors who might achieve apotheosis, post mortum, by a vote in the Senate.

For the early Christians there was no sense that their mission was to change the political order by revolution; no obsession with human development; no promotion of an ideology; no bid to seize power, in order to control the world. The revolution was, *and is*, our own repentance; our development, the recovery of the image and likeness of God; any ideology gives way to the mind of Christ; and the power is of the Holy Spirit. In fact, for the first Christians there was a certain distance from politics, holding onto the world with a light grip, as in all things. This is why the writer of an early Christian text called, the Epistle to Diognetus (c.124AD) could say that Christians, *'take their full part as citizens, but they also submit to anything and everything as aliens. For them, any foreign country is a motherland, and any motherland is a foreign country.'*

This all changed with the coming of St Constantine the Great from 312AD: Gradually, the emperor was seen to possess authority not because he was divine but because he was appointed by

God. For the eastern Byzantine empire, this meant the development of an ideal, aspiring towards a 'symphony' between emperor and patriarch; in the West, instead, there evolved the strange concept of the Western Christendom itself becoming a political entity with the emergence of the Papal States and the shocking idea that the Pope of Rome could sponsor and even wage war himself against other states!

The world, of course, ever in flux, has not stood still and there is a lot of history between us and those times. Different polities have been devised and tried, even the notion that somehow it is a Christian duty to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Calvin's Zurich and the Pilgrim Fathers in America spring to mind as vain attempts to set up the rule of godly and righteous government by force of Law. Whereas this might seem obligatory for the followers of Man from Medina (if you can cite an Islamic theocracy that has been an image of paradise on earth, let me know!) it will not work in Christian Theology; political laws can no more perfect the human soul than the Law of Moses did in Old Testament times.

Religion (of any kind) and politics are a powerful but volatile mixture. Interestingly, it is hard to think of a great civilization that was not aligned with a religious system. From the Sumerians of the Fertile Crescent to Pan-European civilization up to the Enlightenment, religious worldviews have been the bedrock of human societies. Attempts to establish idealised political systems in the last century all collapsed in infamy, as the poet T S Eliot wrote, *'Dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.'* ['Choruses from the Rock']

In British we have our own, unique historical experience of religion and its relationship to politics. The Christian Church is an older institution here than the monarchy of a unitary state. The basic liturgical rite for the coronation of the monarch (and it is thought, even the metalwork of the first English crown itself) were produced by our own St Dunstan, as Archbishop of Canterbury. But the upheavals of the Norman Conquest (11th Century) the

Reformation (16th Century) and the Civil War (17th Century) all left their marks on the constitution of church and state. More particularly, the gradual development of full representative democracy raised an intriguing question about authority. Abraham Lincoln's pithy definition of the word in his famous Gettysburg Address: *'Government of the people, by the people, for the people.'* cites authority as coming from the populace in general. In other words, a power being handed *up* from the people, rather than being something imposed from *above*. Yet, strictly speaking, in the British Constitution, authority is given, by God's grace, to reigning monarch who, in turn, exercises that authority through an elected, representative parliament. This almost sacramental nature of the monarchy in Britain is largely unknown now to the majority of the voting population and, certainly, would not be understood by most.

Parliament, though hardly representative of the whole nation originally, was set up to raise taxes in support of the monarch's policies, and more particularly, to control the spending of the money raised: hence the Civil war between Charles I and Parliament. And where, by the Eighteenth Century, government was there for two basic purposes only, Law and Order and the Defence of the Realm, gradually, from the next century onwards, Parliament took charge of an increasing portfolio of concerns. We have arrived at a point now (and this is no doubt true of many countries in the world) where the general population expects government almost to be responsible (somehow) for most areas of their daily lives. As we have seen during the current pan(dem)ic, the majority of the population have been so alarmed by messages widely distributed by both central government and the media, that they seem content to relinquish more and more of their natural freedoms. Traditionally, British Common Law worked on the idea of liberties: one could do whatever, as long as it was

not forbidden by law. This, again, has largely been forgotten by most, to be replaced by the idea of rights, *granted from on high* by government.

From our own Orthodox Christian perspective, we now observe an historical process where the Christian roots of the nation's political and social life are steadily being cut off. In their place have emerged a variety of small interest groups, each demanding special recognition in law on the basis that Equality is the only political value, overriding any appeal to tradition, origin, locality, indigenous culture and cautious conservatism. As I said in the recent homily, we live in an age, and a location, where the link between culture and Christianity is being unravelled. In its place Secularism concentrates the gaze on the material world, the mundane, the subjective, the physical realities, on that which is transient and is passing away. Even much education (promoted by government) has come to mean the manipulation of once enquiring minds against anything in a shared past, replacing actual knowledge with a limited set of, so called, 'skills.' In short, the indoctrination with anything that might undermine a Christian culture and civilisation. How ironic that, in expunging Christianity from public sphere in the western world, the fruit harvested from all this so-called 'progress' has been the perversion of morality and a reversion to paganism.

As Otto Von Bismark remarked, *'Politics is the art of the possible.'* Bearing this in mind, Christian people have a duty (I shall not just say, right) to be involved. We can make our voice heard on the great issues of the day and, where necessary, shout just as loud as any of the small self-interest groups who have done so much to poison public debate in our, once properly functioning, national institutions. Our first aim in life is to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling. That is not achieved through political decisions, however arrived at, but the political sphere can set the temper of the age and lay down conditions of peace that can foster the pursuit of aims higher than just the fulfilling the dictates of human passions, whether for comfort, pleasure, wealth, glory or power.

In the ninth Century, King Alfred the Great of Wessex defeated the pagan Danish invasion, even bringing the Danish leader to Baptism. In this way he fulfilled his political duty, defending the people of the realm and establishing peace, provided the conditions for the flourishing of learning, especially of Christian education. Even if the route is now circuitous, it is still by God's grace that the monarch exercises sovereignty through a parliament that we elect. As Christians we should never despair of practicing the art of the possible. Like the first Christians, we are

not here to change the world: the kingdom will come in God's time. But we must bring the mind of Christ to the public sphere and let our voices be heard. If we let go that responsibility, there are others only too willing to take it from us.

Fr Chrysostom



ANTIOCHIAN WOMAN'S GROUP

From September 2021, Kh. Annemieke, supported by various women parishioners, intends to start an Antiochian Women's Group. She is asking for the blessing of his Eminence Metropolitan Silouan.

Much experience with such groups has been gathered from our Sisters in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. Our overall purpose is to develop among women a spirit of Christian leadership, awareness and commitment; to foster a genuine expression of love and service through works of charity; and to instil a sense of fellowship and a deeper understanding of our Holy Orthodox faith. We are a sisterhood serving Christ through serving others.

The aim of the group will be the further education of women in the Orthodox life through book reading and discussion clubs, the organisation of retreats and pilgrimages, lectures by Orthodox Christian ordained and lay speakers, organised charitable actions etc. It is hoped that this initiative will lead to other Antiochian Orthodox Christian parishes in the UK adopting this practice too, which could lead to an annual national conference where women from all over the UK can report their activities and exchange experiences.

His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph of North America once said, "When everyone left our Lord Jesus Christ alone on the cross, the women were there. Can you see how important the women are? You are the Myrrhbearing women!" We welcome women from the ages of 19 to 99, and urge you to join us in our ministry, remembering that EVERY woman in the Antiochian Church is an "Antiochian Woman"!

All those interested can contact Kh. Annemieke by email on saint-dunstan@gmx.com, or via the Messenger function of the Church's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/saintdunstanorthodox>)

Antiochian Women Prayer

+In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

O Christ our God, we are all pledged to serve Thee with our whole being. Help us to continue to work for Thee through our Church without seeking praise, without seeking personal gain, without judging others, without a feeling that we have worked hard enough and now must allow ourselves rest. Give us strength to do what is right and help us to go on striving and to remember that activities are not the main thing in life. The most important thing is to have our hearts directed and attuned to Thee. Amen.

SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturdays at 5.00pm (Please enter by the side door)

Fr Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards or by appointment. Fr Filip is available for Confession by appointment. Orthros is served before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at 8.45am

July

Sun 4th 2nd after Pentecost
All Saints of Britain Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 11th 3rd after Pentecost
All Saints of Antioch Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 18th 4th after Pentecost
Commemoration of the 4th Ecumenical Council Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 25th 5th after Pentecost
Dormition of Anna, Mother of the Theotokos Divine Liturgy 10.30am

August

Sun 1st 6th after Pentecost
Beginning of the Dormition Fast
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Fri 6th Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord
Divine Liturgy 11.00am



Sun 8th 7th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am



Sun 15th 8th after Pentecost
Dormition of the Theotokos
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 22nd 9th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 29th 10th after Pentecost
Beheading of the John the Baptist (Fast with wine & oil) Divine Liturgy 10.30am