

THE NARTHEX

July-August 2018

'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

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Can you see me?

According to the American writer, Mark Twain, 'There are lies, damned lies and statistics' (*Autobiography* 1924). In other words, although mathematics is a logical, ordered and beautiful thing, numbers can be presented in such a way as to deceive.

The problem, therefore, of estimating the numbers of adherents to particular religions in this country, is a science open to interpretation. Recent figures on European migrants settling in Britain for example, put Romanians as the second largest group (c. 400,000) after Poles. Alongside others from the traditional Orthodox Christian countries, we might assume that the number of our fellow-believers has risen enormously. That is certainly true since the days when I was ordained in 1995.

The problem is, of course, that when it comes to religious allegiance, the elephant in the room is Nominalism: religious in name only. Twice, recently, I have heard followers of the faith of Mohammad of Medina, claiming on the BBC that there are now four million Muslims in Britain. The adherents of Islam appear very adept at self-promotion. Whether these claimed numbers are factual, of course, I have no way of knowing. Whatever the case, they ignore the fact that for most people identifying as religious, their loyalty and practice are largely nominal; that their religion is, for the most part, cultural and not the central meaning and trajectory of their lives. This is certainly the case with Orthodox Christianity, just as much as with any other faith.

No doubt, self-publicists have always been with us. Egyptian pharaohs might have had to erect pyramids in order to promote their grandeur: today the Internet and the media in general allow any individual or group at least to try to shout louder than anyone else.

One of the themes that emerged from our recent archdiocesan conference at Swanwick was precisely how Orthodox Christianity, and not just our own archdiocese, might become more visible in Britain. This requires a very cautious approach when it comes to the broadcast media for a number of reasons.

One approach that we should avoid is that employed by a many minority groups in recent years: claiming to be 'victims.' Clearly there have been all sorts of victims of abuse and cruelty throughout human history. The difference now is the emergence of groups who, sharing common social factors, turn their differences (when compared from the majority) into a political quest for recognition as an endangered species, requiring legal equality and protected status. The end result is a social and media world turned into a room full of barefoot people where one must tread very carefully in heavy boots, for fear of treading on toes!

A perfect example of this nonsense was to be seen recently when, no doubt jealous of the snide abuse suffered by Jewish members of the Labour Party, a spokesman for something called the *Muslim Council of Britain* insisted that the same was happening to Muslims in the Tory Party.

Christians need no lessons in victimhood. We are all too aware of what is suffered by our fellow believers all around the world and especially under Islamic regimes and societies. Where we do need to be wary, however, living as we do in a liberal democracy, is the subtle influence of people who have either a hidden or very open agenda which, if not aimed directly at the destruction of Christianity in Britain, does indeed seek to remould it, in order to accommodate their own world view and life-style; to promote their minority views, choices and way of life, as in fact, 'normal'. This is certainly the case with the LGBT political agenda which, over the last couple of decades, has been very successful in promoting what, in our understanding, is an anthropological heresy that has readily been adopted, especially within liberal Protestant churches. The dawn of Christianity witnessed the rise of Christological heresies (a false understanding of Christ) such as Arianism or Nestorianism. In later centuries there were ecclesiastical heresies (false understandings of the Church) such as Papalism or Phylitism. And now we see the arrival of false understandings of Man as the creation of God, giving rise, for example, to *Transgenderism*. Here, someone conceives the idea that Nature (biological science) must be wrong in having assigned the person this particular body, despite the fact of possessing XX or XY chromosomes.

You may recall the story of the *Emperor's New Clothes*, where a couple of charlatans convince the ruler that they can make him (for a very large fee) the most splendid clothes in the world. These clothes, however, were only visible to the wise; to a fool they were completely invisible. Not wishing to appear fools, the imperial court went along with this confidence trickery, to the point where the emperor even paraded through the streets, believing that he was clothed in the most gorgeous apparel. It took a brave lad to call out that the emperor was, in fact, naked.

The claim that what the transgender heresy calls, 'gender,' is just a social construct, leaves the rest of us like the credulous courtiers in the story of the *Emperor's New Clothes*. The power of the political and social charlatans is just as real as the two charlatan tailors in the story. Wishing to avoid the current social stigma of being thought a fool by accepting the facts, the science and, no doubt, common sense, people are pressurised into accepting the whole nonsensical LGBTQ+ package as right.

If anyone imagines that this is ridiculous, I merely call your attention to a new law being debated in Canada that would criminalise, for something called 'hate-speech', the deliberate use of the wrong gender-pronoun. Interestingly, this echoes another ancient heresy, *Docetism*. This Gnostic idea latched onto Christianity very early; St Ignatius of Antioch had to battle against it. Docetists taught that the incarnation of Christ was not a physical reality but only an *appearance* [Greek: *dokeo*, to seem] imagining that the Divine would never lower itself to be joined with the sinful and impure physical world. Is not Transgenderism, and even the claim to be neuter (of no sex whatsoever) a kind of anthropological Docetism, where ones biological sex is just an *appearance*?

It would seem, therefore, in all seriousness, that western societies have evolved and 'progressed' to such a degree that they have now passed beyond maturity into their dotage. It is interesting that in Britain, whereas perhaps 2% of people might identify as LGBT, when it comes to BBC employees, recent analysis by the 'Head of Diversity' (did you know your license fee helps pay for one of those at the BBC?) the figure rises to 12%, and these people have, in large part, free and influential access to a large section of public broadcasting media.

Although, as a culture and a civilization, we should avoid talking ourselves into a self-fulfilling prophecy of decline, the parallels between our own times and mores and those of the ancient Roman Republic I find eerily similar. We are increasingly in the same position as those earlier Christians vis-à-vis the world. Clearly, as Orthodox believers we must make ourselves visible in the current age, but our reasons for doing this is not because of perceived victimhood, historical grievance or the pursuit of some special legal protection. We need to be seen in order to fulfil our mission to save souls. In part, that will require that we be *contra mundum*, standing out *against* these anthropological heresies that seek nothing less than to abolish Man as a creation in relationship to God. Similarly, let us be known, even if we are unpopular, for opposing abortion, euthanasia, 'recreational' drugs, and homosexual marriage; whilst standing in favour of Life, palliative care, monogamous, heterosexual (traditional) marriage, sobriety and watchfulness: for although our life is lived in this world, it is focused on that age which is to come and is unending.

We can be candid, bold and unashamed, with any need to be afraid of

the taunting that is bound to come from those who have misconstrued the world. We can be like the brave lad in the story, who saw from the start that the emperor was naked. Meanwhile, here are some interesting, if 'damned statistics', suggesting that we might not be entirely alone:

- People who think Islam is not compatible with the British way of life – 56 per cent (ComRes poll, 2016)
- People who disagree with the 'right' of gay people to adopt children – 52 per cent (British Social Attitudes Survey 2013)
- Europeans who want to stop all immigration from Muslim majority countries – 55 per cent (Chatham House, 2017)
- People who believe Britain is a Christian country – 55 per cent (YouGov poll, 2014)
- People who think, rightly, that there are just two genders, male and female – 56 per cent (Fawcett Society, 2016)

Fr Chrysostom

The Building and the Liturgy

When our Archbishop visited us last year he remarked that we should really use the high altar for the Liturgy, rather than what we do at present. Currently, of course, we have the full icon screen. It was not until 13th century that the final form of this type of screen had been developed in Orthodox churches.

An earlier form of the screen in front of the holy table was often a low balustrade, usually with icons and some form of curtain. Interestingly, the baldacchino (canopy with columns) is another feature of altars in early illustrations and we, of course, have a fine example at St Dunstan's. Indeed, this east-end part of our church is modelled on the famous church of St Clemente at Rome.

For some time members of our parish committee have been considering the possibility of following Met Silouan's suggestion. This would entail the removal of the current screen and expanding everything eastward, as it were. Fr Ioan had used the high altar when he was the priest here before 2011. In principle, this idea is correct: the layout of the building requires the use of the High Altar and our current usage takes away a great deal from the splendour of the architecture. There are, though, two large problems with this idea in respect of serving the Orthodox Liturgy in a place with its interior designed for the traditional Western Mass.

Firstly, there are seven short (5 inch) stone steps in black stone, leading up towards the high altar. For the less agile this presents a possible problem when going up to receive the Holy Gifts. Conversely, it does not take much imagination to see the dangers involved if the priest/deacon were to descend the steps with the chalice and wearing long vestments, in order to bring communion down to the level of the people. The solution (as already envisaged by the architect working with our building-renovation programme) is to build a stage area in wood with higher but fewer steps, incorporating, two broader, flat areas: one at the top for communicants, and one below for preaching, weddings, baptisms etc.

The second problem is the high altar itself. Constructed in wood with a mensa (table top) in marble, it is very heavy and very long.

To the eye, it is far too broad for the space provided and almost touches the columns of the baldacchino. To serve our liturgy at such a holy table would present many difficulties, especially in the lack of space and the inability to walk easily around, for example, during the censuring. The solution here, of course, is to move it and it can be accommodated in another part of the building: where currently we have St Luke's shrine on the north side. As this would have to be done by specialist removers with machinery, we have already asked for quotations for the work. Once removed, we would place our own, cube-shaped holy table under the baldacchino. Outside the rail, the icons of Our Lord and His Mother would be placed on stands, outside the curved wooden rail.

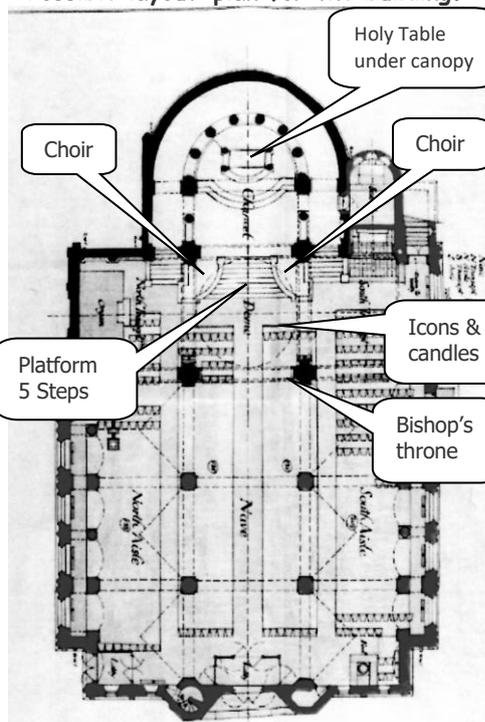
We have checked that English Heritage and the Local Council are content to have this done and indeed, it actually restores the building much more to what it looked like originally.

Everything else in the building would then be moved up one bay, towards the east. This would mean that the Bishop's throne would be placed where the current screen begins on the south side. The Icons of Our Lord, Our Lady and St Dunstan, at present in the Narthex, would move to below the new steps where we would also place the votive candle stands.

The acoustics under the baldacchino are exceptionally good and for the choir, likewise, they would move up to the spaces behind the curved balustrades, either side of the top of the steps. As we have shown by experiment, their sound carries far better in that position, under the dome. From the point of view of safety, opening and using more of the floor space makes sense, especially when we have large crowds in church, as at Pascha. Spreading people around the building prevents crowding at the back and the possible blocking of the exits in case of an emergency.

Whether any of this is possible at present will, of course, depend upon costs which, naturally, will have to be taken into consideration.

Possible layout-plan for the building.



Parish Committee & Directors' Meeting
Thursday 19th July 7.00pm

SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturdays at 5.00pm and on Wednesdays at 6.00pm. Fr. Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards.

Orthros is served before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at 9.00am

July

Sun 1st 5th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am Baptism
12.30pm

Sun 8th 6th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

NB No Vespers on Wednesday 11th
July

Sun 15th 7th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 22nd 8th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 29th 9th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

August

Wed 1st Beginning of the
Dormition Fast

Sun 5th 10th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 6th The Transfiguration of
Our Lord
(Service time to be announced)

Sun 12th 11th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Wed 15th The Dormition of Our
Lady (service time to be
announced)



Sun 19th 12th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 26th 13th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am