

THE NARTHEX

The disciples were first called Christian in Antioch (Acts.11:26)

The Newsletter of St Dunstan's Antiochian Orthodox Church, Poole BH14 9JG. The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of Great Britain and Ireland. Metropolitan Silouan. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Patriarch John X.

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DE EXCIDIO ANGLIAE

Written in 1939 by Ross Parker, Hughie Charles, *There'll Always Be An England*, was a popular song during the Second World War. However, all these years later I am beginning to wonder whether such sentiments can still be expressed without irony. With a nod to St Gildas the Wise and his *de excidio Britanniae* (Concerning the Destruction of Britain) the title of this edition of the Narthex considers what appears to be, in our own day, the destruction of England, both as an idea and as a nation.

I want to explore a particular question regarding what, today, is categorised as identity. This has become very contentious in current political dialogue, or rather, not so much a dialogue, as a shouting match, particularly in respect of certain groups who imagine they are politically engaged, merely by talking loudly while covering their ears.

In particular, I wish to focus on the question of how our Orthodox Christianity relates to our own nationality. Clearly, there are heterodox forms of Christianity that are inextricably bound to nationality. For very obvious historical reasons, to be English, for example, for about nearly four hundred years, it was presumed one was a member of the Church of England; recusant Roman Catholics and Nonconformist Protestants were regarded as somewhat *outré*, with varying degrees of tolerance. Orthodoxy, on the other hand, although frequently plagued by forms of exclusive nationalisms, has clearly marked out Phyletism as heretical (Council of Constantinople, 1872) so that strictly speaking, there are no *national* churches within the communion of the Chalcedonian Orthodox churches, only *local* churches, resident in an area.

This, though, has been a difficult path to negotiate, as time itself has layered regional Orthodoxy with the attire of particular cultures and the ethos of specific nations. Yet, despite all this, it is the fellowship (Gr: *Koinonia*) of Catholic-Orthodoxy that defines, specifies, unites and expresses our common faith and belonging in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.



The English nation itself has its origins in the fifth and sixth century migrations of Germanic peoples into these islands, following the official withdrawal and subsequent collapse of Roman rule from 410 AD onwards. It is almost impossible to say when those Angle, Saxon and Jutish settlers began to think of themselves as English, but there was clearly some reality there by the time that St Bede the Venerable began to write his 'Ecclesiastic History of the English People' (*historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* c. 731 AD).

Within a timespan of fifteen hundred years, Englishness has been refined in the crucible of history by Danish and Norman invasions, dynastic wars, the Black Death, the Crisis of the Reformation, the expansion of Empire, the Industrial Revolution, Two World Wars and contemporary decline. All this has formed English identity around genetic inheritance, history, landscape, language, literature, culture and community. The footsteps of all this are marked in literary form from Beowulf through Chaucer, Shakespeare, the Victorian novel, to a modern degradation with the importation of global influences, unavoidable in a world so interconnected.

The late philosopher, Roger Scruton, coined the term, *oikophilia*, from the Greek meaning, a natural love of one's home and native land. Certainly, since the late 90's, there has been the very opposite of this: a form of virulent *oikophobia*, which has become the default position of significant numbers of people among the ruling



elites, politicians, civil servants, academics, and even armed forces and the police. We have witnessed for a considerable time now, an almost pathological self-loathing that seeks to promote anything other than an English love of home and English identity. From this perspective, Britishness is fine; Britishness is a portmanteau word, a bearer of anything. We are encouraged to have 'British values,' among which are a tolerance of anything now, other than Englishness (although this is never stated too openly). Indeed, His Britannic Majesty's first minister and (and as of the date of publication) still leader of the current government, recently stated that to be British was to be multicultural and diverse. This, of course, is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. If to be British is to be various things, to be anything whatsoever, then it means to be nothing specific, indeed, nothing at all; it has no meaning. One might as well substitute the word *nice* for British. At the same time, acknowledging that to be Irish, or Scots or Welsh is *something*, uniquely for those who exercise control over this body politic, Englishness has become a national identity that dare not be spoken of in polite (ie Woke) and politically correct society. Bizarrely, the present Home Secretary recently claimed in an interview that she considered herself English: she is not, she is the progeny of Pakistani parents. In what way does she lay claim to the historic, cultural and ethnic inheritance of the English? If I were to do that in Pakistan, the Woke Left would accuse me of cultural misapprehension. She may certainly claim British citizenship, but she has no ancestry here. At best, her statement is disingenuous and amounts to a subtle form of colonisation (ironic in a time when the zeitgeist is so keen on decolonisation).



The question I raise, therefore, from our Orthodox Christian perspective, is whether any of this matters? Does the surreptitious dissolving of the English identity, the ruin of England's culture, identity, language, land, literature and historic ethnic memory, have any spiritual consequences for us?

It is often said that, since the Second World War, governments in Britain have just been managing decline. That might well be true, but the fault does not lie entirely with the attitudes of the ruling elites. Looking back, it is obvious that, since the 1960's, social attitudes among the indigenous population have begun to shift. All over the western world changes in mores, public morality and acceptable social behaviour have gradually altered. Anyone like myself, having entered upon one's eighth decade, must have taken note of the changes, but the conclusion to which I have come, cites the cause of this decline of English ethnic identity in two particular places. Firstly, England's loss of religion and secondly, its increasing social decadence. Clearly, these are spiritual questions.

Occasionally, I hear the comment in the public media that religion should be reserved for the private sphere and that loyalty to nationhood should come first. For those seeking eternal salvation in Christ, this is absurd. For what does it profit a man should he gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? (cf. Mk 8:36) Neither can it be said that those recusant Roman Catholics or Protestant Nonconformists were any less English than those who were members of the Church of England, by Law Established. There was certainly a historic diversity among the English, but not in the way that the Prime Minister imagines. Religious differences in this country have been at the root of a great deal of conflict and warfare. But these were civil, not international, wars.

From the time of the Reformation, and particularly the reign of Edward VI, the English character was gradually overlaid with a Calvinistic form of Protestantism. It was aggravated further by the divisions of the English Civil War (ending with the regicide of Stuart king, Charles I in 1649). Furthermore, the so-called Glorious Revolution, that replaced Charles I's second son, King James II (a Roman Catholic), with William of Orange, a Dutch Calvinist, firmly aligned English patriotism with Protestantism. It was confirmed with the death of the childless Queen Anne, when she was succeeded by her nearest Protestant relative, the Elector of Hanover, to ensure that Roman Catholics were kept off the throne. That antagonism was made worse by the attempts to re-establish the Stuart monarchy in 1715 and 1745. But that English Protestant religious identity, although tempered by the scholarly works of the High Church Caroline Divines, The Nonjurors (who refused to renege on their oath of loyalty to James II) and the later Anglo-Catholics, became a fixed, if often, just presumed, mark of English identity. However, it began to experience a sharp decline, probably starting after the First World War. Religious practice among the English was already in decline, certainly among members of the elite groups. By the 1980's and 1990's, only about 25-30% of people attended a church (of any denomination) regularly. The result now is that most of the ethnic English would regard the historic Protestantism of their immediate ancestors as largely irrelevant to them, having no religious affiliation whatsoever.



King Charles I

There is, as ever, space for social and personal hypocrisy in any religion, but the change (dare we say, decline...) of moral attitudes has been notable in Britain as a whole, certainly in terms of what is now socially

acceptable, especially when I compare today with my own childhood experience. It is not that there was no immorality in that remembered past; there was, of course. It is rather that, what might have been covered up then, is now openly practiced and indeed, accepted, or at the very least, tolerated. More perverse still, not to tolerate such mores is now deemed immoral, in a complete volte face of ethical reasoning. The downgrading of marriage, replaced by having 'partners', the ease of divorce, the availability of abortion, the promotion of euthanasia, the acceptance of homosexuality as normal, the fraudulent manipulation of the benefits system, the spurious invention of mental health disabilities, not to mention so-called gender dysphoria, are all symptoms of decline and decadence among the English themselves that has fed into the ability of government to control people's lives through fear. I shall not venture to opine, here, whether there has been any direct causal relationship between the decline of religious practice and moral degradation, but should the English ever disappear in their own land, it will be mostly their own fault.

The fact that more is paid out by the government in welfare benefits than is taken in through Income Tax, lends weight to those who support the idea that many of the English have been overcome by sloth and hedonism. Clearly, this is not true of most, perhaps, but it results in a giant Ponzi scheme that is bound to end disastrously. On top of this, the constant invasion ~ and let's settle on that word ~ of illegal migrants, given priority over the indigenous, tax-paying population, highlights the utter failure of all recent administrations. Add to this the failure of the forces of law and order to deal with flagrant criminality, and the widespread, mostly Mohammedan, rape gangs (apparently facilitated by the blind eyes of authorities of all kinds), corruption within elite groups appears to be endemic, and the proverbial fish, as ever, is rotting, head-downward.

Not least, the decline of England is reflected in its historic national church, which like most forms of Protestantism, holds within it the seeds of its own deformation. Like many of the once useful institutions of the country, it has been infiltrated by pernicious forms of cultural Marxism, and is led by activists with secular, rather than spiritual agendas. As a result, it is losing cohesion and moreover, the respect of more traditional Anglicans in the global South. Even the Church of England's own Supreme Governor presents an uncertain countenance when it comes to His Majesty's religious belonging. It is one thing to tolerate other religions in a liberal democracy, but a constitutional monarch must represent something, not everything. In the end, if diversity becomes the leading characteristic of the nation, the net result now, will not be a cohesive, multicultural society, it will be one replaced by an aggressive incomer called Mohammedanism: a creed that is both a religion and a polity that was spread, originally, by the sword, and now in Britain, by outbreeding the English who have largely forgotten the purpose of marriage.

Only the naive, or the duplicitous, would accept the recent gathering for the Iftar prayers in Trafalgar Square as an exhibition of multicultural Britain: it was a claim towards domination. When a Paschal procession is permitted through Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, I might be inclined to accept such displays as such, but governments in Britain have, historically, exercised a certain legal control over religious activities. Seeing that Mohammedanism is intent on a gradual takeover of Britain, it is reasonable and indeed, necessary, that its practice and operations be clearly restricted within clear legal limits. Whether any administration has the courage for that fight, is entirely another matter, and I doubt if we have few of such character in the current political climate. This derogation of duty, unfortunately, leaves the field open to fanatics and extremists and, I admit, my prognostications only veer towards social unrest in the future. If, in this country, we imagined the arrival of a Neo-Aztec cult, would the Law permit, on the grounds of religious tolerance, the offering of human sacrifices to the sun god, Huitzilopochtli? Of course not. So why permit, unhindered, the progress of a religio-political system that would eventually undermine our whole constitution?

In saying all this I do not lose sight of the fact that our own congregation is made up of a great many different nationalities, each with a distinct identity and cultural experience. Indeed, without the presence of those diverse groups in Britain, there would be little evidence, here, of the recovery of that ancient Orthodoxy of the British Isles that may well have been present here, even since the first century. But I do return, again and again, to the original purpose of the 1995 establishment of a wider Antiochian Orthodox mission in this country. It was for the re-hallowing of our land in its ancient Christian roots. So, although at St Dunstan's we of course, welcome all comers, and we minister to the pastoral needs of Orthodox people from whatever nation they originate, our original purpose and enterprise was to call the English (and all the British) back to its ancient faith. Our mission in Poole began twenty years ago, this year. And by the grace of God, our labour in the Lord is witnessing the first fruits of that recovery.

In short, this makes us all, whether English or otherwise, responsible for the mission of the Orthodox Church in these islands. In Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, he tells of how St Augustine (of Canterbury) arrived, sent by Pope Gregory the Great, (*the Dialogist*) on a mission to convert the pagan English. Coming in before King Aethelberht of Kent in 597, Augustine and his companions processed into the royal enclosure with a cross and an image of Christ, painted on a board. 1,429 years later, we find ourselves in much the same position and on the same mission; we are all Augustine now. This time, our cross is the life we lead in Christ, and His image

is the one inscribed on our hearts, made obvious to all around us. In this way we can bring back this nation to the faith it once possessed, but the time grows short

Fr Chrysostom



THE PARISH LIBRARY

If you have borrowed books from the Library at church, could you please check at home that you have returned them all and signed them back in when you have read them. There are a number of volumes that have been missing for some time. They are listed in the register of books but have no return date entered for them.

PRACTICAL TIP

When you approach the holy chalice for communion, please be sure to come close enough, making certain that the Kalima cloth is clearly under your chin, even if held by the servers.

Please keep your head upright, looking straight ahead. Gentlemen with moustaches should ensure that they are properly trimmed above the lip before coming to communion.

ST DUNSTAN'S FESTIVAL

Saturday 16th May, 1.00 - 2.00pm

Proposed Programme

1:00 PM – Welcome and Presentation in Church

2:00 PM – 5:00 PM – Community Fete and Social Gathering opening with Live Music

If the weather permits, the event will take place in the church courtyard/garden.

If the weather is not favourable, the activities will be moved into the church hall.

The afternoon will include:

BBQ, beer provided by Barking Cat Brewery, homemade cakes and children's activities



SERVICES

PLEASE NOTE Memorials for the Dead are served after the Divine Liturgy only by prior arrangement with the clergy. We remember the departed in Church during the forty days, traditionally, the first, third, ninth and fortieth day of death. Then, after six months and on the anniversary. Memorials are then offered each year on the date of death. We do not accept random lists of the departed whose memorial dates do not occur before or after the Sunday concerned. General lists of names for the departed are commemorated at the Proskomedia (preparation) before the Liturgy. Name lists for the Living and the Dead should be handed in on Sunday morning before 10.15am. (After that, they are not accepted.) Vespers is normally served on Saturday evenings at 5.00pm in the Saints of Britain Chapel. Please enter the church by the side door from the car park. Confessions are heard after Vespers or by appointment. For Baptisms and Weddings, please come to the Divine Liturgy on Sunday and arrangements can be made after the service.

MAY

Sun 3rd	4th of Pascha (The Paralysed Man)	Divine Liturgy 10.30am
	<i>[Liturgy at St Edward's 10.30am]</i>	
Sun 10th	5th of Pascha (The Samaritan Woman)	Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 17th	6th of Pascha (The Blind Man)	Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Tues 19th	St Dunstan of Canterbury	
Thurs 21st	Ascension of Our Lord	
Sun 24th	7th of Pascha (Fathers of the First Council)	Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 31st	HOLY PENTECOST	Divine Liturgy 10.30am
	<i>[Liturgy at St Edward's 10.30am]</i>	

JUNE

Sun 7th	1st after Pentecost	ALL SAINTS	Divine Liturgy 10.30am
		BEGINNING OF THE APOSTLES' FAST	
Sun 14th	2nd after Pentecost	All Saints of Antioch	Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 21st	3rd after Pentecost	All Saints of Britain	Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 28th	4th after Pentecost		Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Mon 29th	Apostles Peter & Paul		