

THE ANGLO-ORTHODOX RAPPROCHEMENT AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

THE Convocations of Canterbury and York having confirmed the terms of the agreement concluded at Bonn on July 2nd, 1931, by the representatives of the Church of England and of the 'Old Catholics,' intercommunion has been established between the State Church of this country and a religious body which, however unimportant and numerically insignificant, possesses, nevertheless, a valid Hierarchy and true Sacraments. The terms of this agreement, ratified also by the 'Old Catholic' Bishops on September 7th, 1931, are expressed in three paragraphs :

- (1). Each communion recognises the catholicity and independence of the other, and maintains its own.
- (2). Each communion agrees to admit members of the other communion to participate in the Sacraments.
- (3). Intercommunion does not require from either communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, devotion or liturgical practices characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian faith.

The third of these paragraphs strikes the keynote to the whole agreement. The comprehensive character of the Church of England spreads beyond the limits of the Anglican communion. No identity or consistency of doctrine is insisted upon—members of both communions may meet together around the Table of the Lord without being united in their faith. And as members of the Established Church profess the most contradictory beliefs on the most essential ques-

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tions of Christian doctrine, they will extend their latitudinarianism to their 'Old Catholic' brethren.

The establishment of intercommunion with the 'Old Catholics,' however interesting in itself, is even more so in another sense, as it makes clear the form which a future agreement between the Church of England and the Eastern Orthodox Churches may take.

For obvious reasons the negotiations with the Orthodox proceed much slower than with the 'Old Catholics.' An important Delegation representing the principal Orthodox Churches visited England in July, 1930, during the Lambeth Conference, and had several meetings with the Anglican Committee appointed by the Conference. At these meetings the Orthodox delegates questioned the Anglicans upon the doctrines of the Eucharist and of Ordination held by their Church, and declared themselves satisfied with the explanations given them. A joint Commission was elected to continue the discussions and prepare a statement on the theological points about which there is difference or agreement between the two communions. The Joint Commission, having been in session at Lambeth on October 15th—20th, 1931, issued a report which deals with Christian Revelation, the relation of Scripture to Tradition, the Creed of the Church, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Sacraments, and other minor questions. This report, as well as the *résumé* of the Joint Commission on the Eucharist and Ordination is to be presented to a Pan-Orthodox Pro-Synod to be convened next summer. According to *The Church Times* (Nov. 6, 1931), the utmost which may be hoped for is a permanent establishment of *economic*¹ intercommunion of Anglicans and Orthodox in countries

¹ The terms *economy* and *economic* are used here in their technical sense, meaning a kind of dispensation from the general rule permitted by ecclesiastical authority for the welfare of the Church.

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outside Great Britain, and a formal recognition of the validity of Anglican orders by the Orthodox Pro-Synod.

As compared with the decisions of the Anglican and 'Old Catholic' Synods concerning intercommunion the attainments reached here appear very modest. Nevertheless, when we study all the attempts for reunion made throughout the ages in various parts of the world, we realise that the present step marks a great advance. Whatever the ultimate result of the Anglo-Orthodox negotiations, it will doubtless have some kind of repercussion upon the whole of Christendom, and it seems timely to examine from the Catholic point of view the causes of this Anglo-Orthodox *rapprochement* with its possible development, the significance of intercommunion, and its effect upon the two bodies themselves and upon the Catholic Church.

I. CAUSES OF THE ANGLO-ORTHODOX RAPPROCHEMENT.

Like the Catholics, the Orthodox and Protestants have never ceased to hope for the unity of Christendom. Almost from the first day of their apostacy, the Protestants never wearied in their attempts to reach an understanding with the Eastern Churches on the ground of a common protest against Rome. The Tübingen professors in 1574, the Nonjurors in 1716-1724, Archbishop Abbot and the Dutch divines of Calvinist leanings in Cyril Lukaris's lifetime (1620-38), William Palmer and Dr. Neale at the time of the Oxford Movement, W. J. Birkbeck in the 'nineties of last century, and, in our days, a large group of 'Anglo-Catholics' bear witness to an almost uninterrupted effort to enlist Orthodox sympathies. Though at times rebuffed by the Orthodox, the Protestants never tired of renewing their advance. On the Or-

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thodox side this desire for union bore the character of a pious but somewhat abstract aspiration. Though in her liturgy the Greek Church prays for 'the reunion of all,' the Orthodox appear to have contemplated reunion chiefly from the point of view of ecclesiastical expediency. The Union of Florence, the transactions of Lukaris with the Calvinists, and the present negotiations seem all to have the same background. One of the principal causes of the present *rapprochement* can be looked for in the post-war conditions of the East. The principal supporters of this 'reunion' are to be found in those countries which have suffered most during or after the War, or are dependent on Great Britain. Yugoslavia, Rumania and even Bulgaria are less keen on 'reunion' than are the Phanar, Alexandria, Jerusalem or Athens. In pre-War days, however strongly nationalist, the Eastern Churches had a strong support in Imperial Russia. Considering herself the legitimate heiress of Byzantium and natural protectress of Eastern Christians, Russia not only helped them financially, but actually intervened on their behalf on several occasions. The downfall of Russia as a political power left a breach in the whole structure of Eastern Christianity. The new Yugoslavia and enlarged Rumania are still unable to replace Russia, and a strong protector is needed by the harassed Churches of the East. Great Britain, were she Orthodox, might become this natural protector, and hence we witness an increasing desire on the part of the smaller Eastern Churches to persuade themselves that the chasm separating them from the Anglicans can be filled. The very fact of the establishment of the Church of England, far from being a handicap to union, is an advantage, for in the Eastern conception a State Church is a normal thing.

The material side is also sometimes put forward as one of the causes of the *rapprochement*. No doubt

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the Anglicans, as well as other Protestant bodies, have helped generously, and do help the Orthodox. Especially the Eulogian group of the Russian Church in exile has benefited substantially by Protestant donations. On the other hand, Catholics have probably done even more than the Protestants to help their brethren in need. And whilst we could expect a similar *rapprochement* between Orthodox and Catholics, we can distinctly observe quite the opposite. Catholics are generally suspected of proselytising amongst the Orthodox by means of material assistance. Even the generous work of the Papal Mission on behalf of the starving peasants of Russia has occasionally been misinterpreted in this sense. The cause of this strange attitude seems to lie in the fact that whereas Catholics help the individuals directly, Protestants do it through the Orthodox Churches and their Hierarchy. And as it is the Hierarchy which still has the greatest influence in church matters, their sympathy to those who help *them* naturally results in a pro-Protestant activity on their side. And the other extraordinary fact is that this friendly feeling towards the Protestants in general remains even when they carry on a definite proselytising campaign amongst the Orthodox. Whilst the return of the Russian Uniates to the Catholic Church to which they formerly belonged is branded as an act of enmity towards the Orthodox Church, secession to the numerous Protestant sects (Baptists, Methodists, Adventists, etc.) in the Border States, in Russia and in the emigration is either passed over in silence, or even favourably commented upon in the Russian Press.

We must look for the reason of this different attitude towards Catholics and Protestants in the next and more important cause: *the common fear of Rome*. Protestants and Orthodox alike realise that they are unable to withstand the attacks of unbelief and of all the enemies of religion of which Mr. Belloc speaks in

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his *Survivals and New Arrivals*. The mere appeal to 'religious experience' is insufficient against the arguments of scientific negation and materialism, and the vagueness of Orthodox and Protestant theology is no solid basis for a clear philosophy which could oppose the destructive teachings. Those thinkers who attempt to do so usually fall into the opposite error condemned by the Church. Catholic doctrine and theology alone present a firm and reliable basis for human thought, and this is realised even by the unbelievers. This pre-eminence of Catholic thought attracts the intellectual *élite* of Christianity, whereas simple religious people are also attracted by her definite teaching, by the order reigning within the Church and the fullness of the religious life within the Fold. All this is realised by those outside the Church, and an attempt is made to form a 'Universal' Church in opposition to the Catholic Church. Hopes have been expressed, both on the Orthodox and the Protestant side, that, faced with such a re-united body, Rome would become less intransigent, surrender her claim to supremacy and infallibility, and perhaps adopt a more democratic form of government.

These seem to be the principal motives for the friendship between Orthodox and Anglicans. Will it result in anything more important than an exchange of usual courtesies? Personally, I am inclined to think that regular intercommunion *will* be established between the Anglicans and the Orthodox at no distant date. At first 'economic' communion will be established in countries outside Great Britain to answer the need of Orthodox emigrants residing in America and the Colonies. When this experiment proves workable—and with the defective instruction of the Orthodox laity there is no reason to question it—then the 'economic' intercommunion will be spread over all countries and become regular intercommunion. That would be

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tantamount to the union of the Orthodox with the Anglicans; and, through the latter, with other Protestants. There is certainly the difficulty of the doctrinal difference between the two Churches and the question of the validity of Anglican Orders. But, provided that all the Orthodox Churches, or at least the majority of them, recognise this validity and declare themselves satisfied with the doctrinal teaching of the Anglicans, *as exposed to the Orthodox delegates*, leaving aside declarations which make union difficult, there seems to be nothing to prevent a formal union of both Communions.

II. MEANING OF INTERCOMMUNION.

It will probably be objected that intercommunion is not the same as *Reunion*, and indeed the formation of an Anglo-Orthodox Church is out of question. Nevertheless, the importance of regular intercommunion must not be overlooked. In all times the Church admitted intercommunion only on the ground of an identity of faith. It was quite inconceivable, for instance, that an Orthodox priest should give Holy Communion to an Arian or another heretic, or even schismatic, and the unity existing between the Churches of Antioch and that of Gaul consisted in a common faith guaranteed by a recognised centre of infallibility and the participation in the Sacraments. Therefore, if in our days the Anglicans and Orthodox succeeded in establishing intercommunion between themselves, thus implying the mutual recognition of their doctrines as true, this would be an act of *union*, even, if no attempt is made to establish some kind of centre of government for the united Church. It would mean not only that a Protestant clergyman could celebrate at an Orthodox altar and *vice-versa*, that persons of one communion could receive the Sacraments at the

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hands of ministers of the other, but also that Bishops of one communion could consecrate and ordain ministers for the other. All this would lead to very important changes in both communions.

III. THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF INTERCOMMUNION.

On the Anglican side I first of all foresee discontent on the part of the extreme Evangelicals, who might be driven out of the Established Church into Nonconformity by the union with the 'corrupted Churches of the East,' as they call them. Yet their number will probably be small, and as at the same time some kind of *economic* intercommunions will be established with other Protestant bodies in the form of admitting non-conformists to communion in Anglican churches, the Evangelical opposition will be insignificant. The 'Anglo-Catholics' will certainly be the winners. Their age-long hopes will be realised, and the advocates of a Romeward movement silenced for a time. The attitude of the Modernists is difficult to foresee. In spite of a certain suspicion of the rigidity of Orthodox theology, Protestant modernists might easily realise that contemporary orthodox theologians are not so remote from themselves. They might discover that closer intercourse between them and the progressive elements of the Orthodox Church might lead to a gradual alteration of the doctrinal teaching of the Orthodox. Even now, attempts are being made to represent Orthodox doctrine in a way acceptable to Protestants. It was affirmed recently by the Patriarch of Alexandria that the Orthodox Church does not possess a formulated doctrine beyond the definitions of the Oecumenical Councils, and that the Orthodox Confessions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are imperfect and have a limited authority. (*Church Times*, 24/4/31). This declaration, if referring to the celebrated Confes-

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sions of Faith of the Patriarch Dositheus and that of the Metropolitan Peter Moghila, seems a novelty, for these confessions were always accepted by the whole Orthodox Church as the expression of the Orthodox teaching on subjects which were not dealt with by the General Councils. The statement of the Patriarch Meletios can be compared with the teaching of the Russian lay theologian Khomiakov, now adopted by many orthodox divines, that the Oecumenical Councils themselves are not infallible organs for the proclamation of the teaching of the Church, that such organs do not exist, and that infallibility belongs to the whole Church—episcopate, clergy and laity, whereby dogmas become such only by the consensus of the whole Christian body.

The Eucharistic teaching of the Orthodox Church is being brought nearer to that of the Anglicans. Both Anglican and Eastern theologians, emphasising the fact that the Orthodox Church never accepted the distinction between substance and accidents, conclude that in using the word *Transubstantiation* the Orthodox never gave it the same meaning as the Catholics, and that 'the doctrine of Transubstantiation has never been a dogma of the Orthodox Church.' (Stef. Zankov, *The Eastern Orthodox Church*, p. 117). This, of course, is a misstatement, as the doctrine of the Orthodox and of the Catholic Church on this subject is identical. The much discussed teaching on the *Sophia* of the Paris professors of the Russian Theological Academy is nothing but veiled Pantheism, approaching that of the English Modernists. It is possible to surmise, therefore, that a closer union between the Orthodox and the Anglicans will result on the Orthodox side in an alteration of doctrine and ensuing loss of their orthodoxy.

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One important question will no doubt again be raised. As we know, the question of the validity of their ordinations has always been a delicate point for the Anglicans. Intercommunion with the Orthodox, and even the insignificant body of 'Old Catholics' would, as certain Anglicans believe, solve this question through 'Old Catholic' or Orthodox Bishops participating in Anglican consecrations. Though Anglicans assure us that they never had any doubt as to the validity of their orders, the whole history of their Church proves the reverse. The well known memorandum concerning Parker's consecration, with William Cecil's marginal notes, bears witness to the doubts which reigned in the mind of the man who was the principal instrument in the creation of the Established Church and its hierarchy. Had the Anglicans been as certain of their Orders as, say, the Nestorians of Mesopotamia or the semi-barbaric Abyssinians, they would not have been always so anxious to secure some valid prelate to participate in the consecration of one of their bishops. As far back as 1617 this had already occurred when the apostate Bishop de-Dominis of Spalato joined in the consecration of Bishop Felton. The question has been thoroughly examined by Estcourt and other theologians, and the unanimous conclusion is that the assisting bishops cannot confer the grace of the episcopal order when the validity of the principal consecrator is denied. The same situation would arise now, were an Old Catholic or Orthodox Bishop to participate in the consecration of a future Archbishop of Canterbury. Were he to participate as an assistant only, his participation would not validate the invalid consecration by the Anglican consecrator. Moreover, what rite of consecration would be used? If it is the Anglican Ordinal, its invalidity has been settled once for all by the Bull *Apostolicae Curae* of Pope Leo XIII. No one, using the

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Anglican Ordinal, can perform a valid consecration, therefore in order to begin a new and valid succession of the Anglican hierarchy it would be necessary to adopt either the Orthodox or 'Old Catholic' form of consecration. This would be no better than the recognition of the invalidity of their orders, and its significance would be the same as re-consecration of the Anglican hierarchy.

But if the Anglicans gain nothing from the participation of the Orthodox in their consecrations, the latter, if not sufficiently careful, might easily introduce chaos into their own Orders. Supposing that an Orthodox residing in a Protestant country were consecrated by bishops of the Anglican communion. Even were they to use the Orthodox ritual, their consecration would not be valid, as they themselves do not possess the validity of the episcopal order. It is, of course, too early to speculate about what might happen, yet it is never too early in view of the serious step which the Orthodox are about to take, to warn them of the danger connected with this step. The Orthodox have valid Orders, and were they to invalidate their Orders through sacramental union with Protestants, their position would be the same as that of the Protestants, and their corporate reunion to the Catholic Church would become as difficult as that of the latter.

To conclude this study it remains to show that Anglo-Orthodox 'reunion,' if ever reached, might settle one of the greatest difficulties standing between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox. This difficulty has been quite correctly perceived by the late Fr. Peter Isvolsky, former Chief Procurator of the Russian Holy Synod and subsequently chaplain of the Russian Church in Brussels. Disciplinary, ritualistic and other questions separating the Eastern and Western Churches, however important, could be mutually agreed upon. The significance and the authority

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of the Roman Pontiff appears to be the crucial problem; and yet there is another question which from the human point of view makes the reunion of the Churches impossible. Both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox believe themselves to be the holder of the whole truth. In other words, we may say that each believes herself to be the whole Church from which the other has seceded. Therefore, each expects from the other a repudiation of her errors and the return to the truth of the Mother Church. This, as Fr. Isvolsky adds, 'is how the Roman Church acted at each genuine attempt at reunion, and we must not be astonished that the Orthodox Church should act in the same way.' In fact, this would really mean that each Church can, if she believes herself the true Church, demand nothing else but complete submission. Rome has always been consistent when she claimed that reunion is possible only in the form of a return of the seceded bodies to the unity of Church. This unity was never broken, despite the schisms and heresies. The Church was One, and remained One, and so she will be till the end of the world. Were the Orthodox Church as consistent, she would insist that 'reunion' with the Protestants is possible only on the condition of their submission—the acknowledgment of their errors and complete acceptance of the Orthodox teaching. Any other agreement would tacitly imply that the Orthodox have abandoned their belief that they consider their Church the only one true Church founded by Jesus Christ on earth. They would in fact accept the belief that the Church has been split up into many parts, of which each holds some parts of the truth. It is easy to see how this would alter the whole position between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox. The Catholic Church alone would claim to be the whole and unique Church of Christ. She alone would be entitled to demand the return of the dissident bodies to her unity;

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not the reverse. A 'Church' formed of broken fragments would always remain incomplete, the authors of the scheme agreeing in advance that no reunion would be complete without the participation of the Great Church of the West. In striking contrast to this incompleteness, the Catholic Church would stand greater than ever, her 'Unicity' being more obvious than at any time before. Unique, complete, universal, she possesses the whole Revelation of Our Lord, the whole Truth. She is in no need for the return of the parts that fell away. Her life has not suffered from their secession. But, as a mother, she watches her rebel children with a loving eye, and is always ready to open her arms to her prodigal sons who from bitter experience may come at last to realise that only in the 'house built upon the rock' will they find security and peace.

G. BENNIGSEN.