Unity and Difference in Christianity

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The difference between Catholics that comes out very plainly in recent writing on the Resurrection (*New Blackfriars*, October and November 1977, pp 453-461 and 506-515) prompts questions and reflections about the nature and extent of the diversity of belief that exists within the Catholic communion. This is particularly urgent and apposite at the present time, in England, as Catholics seem to be moving, slowly but inexorably, towards some degree of communion with the Anglican Church—long mocked as the home of incompatible beliefs. As Cardinal Hume said, in his address at Church House, Westminster, on 1st February 1978:

> "We do not yet know what diversity of doctrinal emphasis or differences of practice will not only be permissible but also desirable".

That avowal of ignorance—which is also clearly a word of *hope*—must seem to many Catholics even now very like an admission of defeat. Surely, they will say, the one thing that Roman Catholics can be clear about is what diversity of doctrinal emphasis and difference of practice are permissible. How is it possible that, on any but trivial and peripheral matters, there can be a serious question about this? Do we not already know, have we not always known, what doctrinal differences we cannot permit—far less desire—within the communion of the *catholica?* How can a cardinal archbishop ask such a question?

I

In the last twenty years of the seventeenth century Leibniz, the great German philosopher of the Enlightenment, himself a Protestant by upbringing, conducted a long correspondence about Christian reunion with Bossuet, one of the most celebrated Catholic preachers of all time. They were both very remarkable men. Bossuet was prepared for ordination by St Vincent de Paul; in 1669 he became a bishop, and for the next eleven years he served as tutor to the dauphin of France. He played a considerable part in ecclesiastical politics. He promoted moderately Gallican principles (thus encouraging the movement to minimize the authority of the papacy over a national church). He approved of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which drove thousands of French Calvinists into enforced apostasy or emigration. As well as writing works that have become classics of French devotional lit-

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erature, he had a bitter controversy over mysticism with Fénelon (helping to have him condemned for quietism), as well as a vigorous fight against the influence of Richard Simon, the pioneer of Old Testament criticism, who denied (in a book published in 1678) that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch–for which Simon was expelled from the Oratorians.

It is, of course, not all that difficult, particularly in the British Isles, to find Catholics with the Bossuet syndrome: cool towards Rome, deeply hostile to Protestants, against quietism, and suspicious of biblical criticism. Keeping a canny distance from the Vatican, opposing Protestantism whenever the opportunity arises, detesting the passivity and renunciation of human effort and responsibility that quietism favours, and reluctant to get too deeply embroiled in newfangled biblical interpretations–this may form a pattern of which the internal coherence is difficult to understand, but there are many Catholis around, both converts and the progeny of traditionally Catholic tribes, who display the Bossuet syndrome. It might be thought by the outsider that coolness towards the Roman see would not go comfortably with anti-Protestantism, but in fact the widespread dislike of protestantism that is evident among Catholics in the British Isles seems to go quite happily with a moderate Gallicanism. It might be thought also that a tendency towards fundamentalism in biblical interpretation would not fit in with the stress on man's contribution that suspicion of quietism necessitates; but there again, as experience shows, the combination is not at all uncommon. The Bossuet syndrome remains a profile which many Catholics who have never heard of Bossuet continue to display.

Leibniz, oddly enough for a philosopher of the Enlightenment, was employed for the last forty years of his life to write the history of the House of Brunswick. He lived just long enought to see his employer become King of Great Britain and Ireland. More bizarre still, it was the women of the household with whom Leibniz found intellectual companionship. Sophie (the mother of the future King) and her daughter Sophie Charlotte (his sister) enjoyed philosophical argument with Leibniz and much of his writing, including the *Theodicy,* was the outcome of these discussions. It is hard to imagine these characteristically dumpy Hanoverian princesses discussing philosophy with one of the universal minds of the seventeenth century: the inventor of one of the first calculating machines, a discoverer of the infinitesimal calculus, the indefatigable promotor of schemes for scholarly research and scientific collaboration all over western Europe, not to mention the thinker of the "monadology", the ontological system of which the last version is to be found in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus.* Leibniz was among the first thinkers who sought to overcome the philosophy of Descartes, and to do so in the context of attempting to bring

the new ways of thinking associated with the rise of natural science together with medieval thought, for which the Protestant Leibniz had far more respect than the Jesuit-educated Descartes ever showed.

Before he settled as court historian in Hanover, among the endless moors of northern Germany, Leibniz spent some years as a diplomat at the Catholic court of the Elector of Mainz. He thus had experience of living with Catholics as well as with Lutherans, which does not seem to have reduced his hopes of Christian reunion. But the proposals in which he persisted, in his correspondence with Bossuet, always involved the sifting out of a set of agreed doctrines. It is a programme with which we are more and more familiar. But instances of doctrinal agreement seem to raise as many questions as they settle. If Leibniz's dream of reunion through agreed doctrines suggests itself as a precursor of a patiently rational approach to ecumenism, Bossuet's syndrome must also be remembered as representing the hard reality and the awkward particularity of a distinctive Catholic "position" which, far from being the only one, is maintained at all only in tension with a variety of all but incompatible alternatives.

II

The ecumenical movement is usually dated from the World Missionary Conference which was held in Edinburgh in 1910. It was a predominantly Protestant initiative. In 1920, however, the Patriarch of Constantinople issued an encyclical letter appealing to "all the Churches of Christ" for "closer intercourse and mutual co-operation". The Greek Orthodox have always been suspicious of ecumenism, the Church of Russia condemned it in 1948 (but relented in 1961). The Lambeth Conference of 1920 committed the churches of the Anglican Communion to "reunion", and to that they have remained firmly committed. When observers accredited by the Vatican at last attended the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1961 the participation of churches in communion with the Roman see began to count.

In 1965 Pope Paul VI and the Patriarch Athenagoras nullified the anathemas which had been in force since the year 1054. The fatal year in the history of the relationship between Rome and the eastern churches was, however, the year 1204, when a son of the dispossessed Emperor of Byzantium persuaded the Crusaders to turn aside from their destination to restore him and his father to the throne in Constantinople. This western intervention (by invitation) in Byzantine politics led to the sack of the city, the destruction of the Church of the Holy Wisdom, the setting of harlots on the patriarch's throne by the jovial western hearties, and other horrors which completed the breach between Christian east and Christian west, leaving deep-seated fears of western aggression that persist to this day—and of which (on the whole) western Christians,

whether of reformed churches or otherwise, have about as much comprehension as the British have of what the Irish feel about certain more recent matters.

A German Lutheran pastor told me recently that it was only when he spent two years on patristic research in Greece that he realised how much closer he stands to the Roman Catholics of whom he had been brought up to disapprove, than he does to the Orthodox, who (for example) would not treat him as any kind of minister. That is not to say that he would be treated as a priest by many (if any) Catholics, but he would surely nowadays be regarded as something other than a layman. At least it taught him that the divisions in the Christian west, when reviewed in the context of the divisions between the Christian east and the Christian west, become, if not less, then certainly different. It also suggests how little the status of ministers, and particularly the validity of bishop's and priest's orders, have to do with Christian reunion. The gap between Rome and the eastern patriarchates is very wide and most unlikely to be closed in this century, and yet there has always been mutual recognition of orders (give and take odd patches of ignorance). There can thus be mutual recognition of orders without communion, or "intercommunion", except in very unusual circumstances, and even then perhaps only unilaterally.

But of course the schism between the ancient churches of the Christian east and the church of Rome (including her Lutheran, Cranmerian and Calvinist progeny, not to mention subsequent offshoots) goes much further back, beyond 1054, back at least to Christmas Day in the year 800 when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne, king of the Franks, as "Holy Roman Emperor". This marked officially the independence of western Europe from Byzantium. It also brings us back to the age of the "undivided Church", the age (that is to say) of the Church of the Seven Councils. The seventh Council (Nicaea II), in the year 787, is the last of the councils of the Church which are recognized as "oecumenical" by both eastern and western Christendom. It was convoked by the Empress Irene at the instigation of the Patriarch Tarasius of Constantinople (formerly her chief secretary and uncanonically installed as patriarch by her initiative). Part of his purpose was to restore good relations between the Byzantine Church and Rome. Among many other interesting matters, this Council eventually declared null the election by a secular authority of bishops (thus reflecting the perennial problem of church/state relations), and forbade the stay of women in monasteries of men as well as the erection of double monasteries. But the main work of the Council was to insist on the propriety of venerating icons.

In the Moscow Agreed Statement of 1976 it was noted that, while the Anglicans accept the dogmatic decrees of the fifth, sixth and seventh Councils, they are in practice accustomed to lay

emphasis on the first four, which means that doctrinal development at conciliar level stops for them with Chalcedon, in the year 451. A glance at the Oxford theology syllabus, or cursory acquaintance with current Anglican theological controversy, would soon confirm that Chalcedon is a terminus. Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes uphold the special importance of the first four Councils. In fact the decisions of the first four Councils and the authority of the Scriptures have a privileged role in Anglican doctrine. The Orthodox, on the other hand, cannot see why the fifth, sixth and seventh Councils, and their dogmatic decisions, are of any less importance than the first four. On the contrary, they regard the positive injunctions of Nicaea II about the veneration of icons as an expression of faith in the Incarnation. The Anglicans at the Moscow discussions were prepared to agree that it would be an error to reject the practice of venerating icons if that implied rejection of the doctrine of the Incarnation. In this respect, that is to say, they were saying only that veneration of icons, like devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, while certainly admissible practices, are not "necessary to salvation".

The delegates at Moscow sought to distinguish between the liturgical use of icons in the Orthodox churches and the place of statues in the Catholic Church. The "Romish doctrine" of images, condemned in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, evidently refers only to statues. When Roger Beckwith (Latimer House, Oxford) stated that "in the Anglican Church a considerable body of opinion dreads the veneration of three-dimensional images as incurring temptation to the sin of Idolatry", the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Australia concurred with him, saying that "three-dimensional Western images are an expression of the self-sufficiency of this world while icons reflect the other world". It may be thought fortunate that Bishop R. P. C. Hanson was present: "he objected strongly to the suggestion that any twentieth-century Christians were idolators", which perhaps stopped the discussion from proceeding too far into the realms of anti-Romish fantasy. Presumably the altar-pieces of Cranach and Grünewald and the thousands of (admittedly often very inferior) works in that style that have occupied an honoured place in village churches all over western Europe for generations could not appear to an Orthodox archbishop to be "an expression of the self-sufficiency of this world". The tradition of western church art that derives from the Renaissance, and is epitomised in the sculpture of Michelangelo, might arguably count as a celebration of man (I should myself argue against its being dismissed as "self-sufficiency"). In general, however, as the notes published so far suggest, the argument wandered into very tricky questions. The Orthodox were stated to "venerate icons for the same reason as they venerate relics, because both are places of the special action of the grace of

God"—which at least makes the place of icons intelligible to Catholics, who cannot be accused of having no respect for relics. The theological foundation of the cult of relics as it was worked out by Thomas Aquinas, on principles laid down by Jerome and Augustine, stresses the special dignity of the bodies of saints and martyrs as temples of the Holy Spirit destined to a glorious resurrection, and thus comes very close to the celebration of the *body*, in conjunction with a full-blooded doctrine of physical resurrection and of the goodness of matter, which the Orthodox seek to affirm in venerating icons. The sale of genuine relics, not to mention the fabrication of false ones, is punished by excommunication. Disgust at abuses of that nature should not lead to dismissal of the cult of relics as such. The contempt, or indifference, that "progressive" Catholics today often exhibit towards the cult of relics betrays a deep-seated reluctance to face death and to honour the body, a turning away from the prospect of mortality and from the value of materiality, which is characteristic of liberal idealism at large. The seventh Council anathematized those who despise holy relics and laid down that no church should be consecrated without them, and in this the Catholic and the Orthodox traditions remain at one.

Philosophical issues then appeared. Roger Beckwith said that "he must be able to defend in a credible way any statement for which he was held responsible", and this seems to have involved (the notes so far published are very fragmentary) a request to distinguish between two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations of Christ and of the saints, thus between icons and statues. It is not clear how he thought that this distinction might be made, but the Bishop of Truro wanted no reference made to the condemnation of the "Romish doctrine" of images: "He thought the philosophy behind Mr Beckwith's view to be pure nominalism, and to ignore the part played by the body in our knowledge of God". There was a general feeling among the delegates that more preparatory work was required before any statement could be made. In the end, the Moscow Agreed Statement runs as follows (paragraph 15):

> "The Orthodox regard the Seventh Council as of equal importance with the other Ecumenical Councils. They understand its positive injunctions about the veneration of icons as an expression of faith in the Incarnation. The Anglican tradition places a similarly positive value on the created order, and on the place of the body and material things in worship. Like the Orthodox, Anglicans see this as a necessary corollary of the doctrine of the Incarnation. They welcome the decisions of the Seventh Council in so far as they constitute a defence of the doctrine of the Incarnation. They agree that the veneration of icons as practised in the East is not to be rejected, but do

not believe that it can be required of all Christians. It is clear that further discussion of the Seventh Council and of icons is necessary in the dialogue between Orthodox and Anglicans, as also of Western three-dimensional images and religious paintings which we have not adequately discussed".

But the importance of the theological, liturgical and philosophical issues is clear, even if the disentangling of them would be difficult. The question of the nature of representations in works of art of any kind, a fortiori in sacred art, as well as the question of the relation of the material to the spiritual in *any* case, a fortiori in the case of the Incarnation and the Resurrection, surely determine the course of the discussion.

In distinction from the Church of England, the Roman Church has never attached any special importance to the first four Councils. In practice, however, Catholics leap from Chalcedon to Trent, or (if that seems too sweeping) the first four Lateran Councils surely carry more weight in the development of the Catholic tradition than the fifth, sixth and seventh Councils. The Second Council of Constantinople, in the year 553, was called by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian. It is perhaps not too brutal a simplification to say that he wanted to save from schism the Monophysite Christians who persisted in emphasising the divine nature in the person of Christ to the point of devaluing or excluding the human nature. They thus rejected the two natures/one person formula worked out at Chalcedon. In the end, despite all the Emperor's efforts to keep them in communion, the break became final when they consolidated themselves in the Coptic Church (Egypt and Ethiopia), in the Church of Syria (the other Jacobites), and in the Armenian Church. As the Monophysites wanted, Constantinople II in fact condemned, posthumously, the works of certain theologians of Antioch who were suspected of Nestorian tendencies (of being inclined to place too much emphasis on the humanity of Christ at the expense of his divinity). The pope at the time, Vigilius, who had served as apocrisiarius at the Byzantine court at one time, was brought to Constantinople by order of the Emperor but refused to attend the Council for fear of violence. He never wanted the alleged Nestorians to be condemned and consented to the decrees of the Council only when the Emperor refused to let him go back to Rome until he did so. He held out for six months, but then gave way, only to die before reaching home. Although Orthodox writers will say that Constantinople II reinterpreted the decrees of Chalcedon in a way more congenial to Alexandria than to Antioch, and sought thus to be more constructive than the Chalcedonian formula in explaining how the two natures of Christ unite to form a single person, the decisions have had little impact in the West because the whole context of the controversy, not to mention the political undercurrents and infighting, were quite remote. It is true

that Roman participation was much more important at the sixth Council (Constantinople III in the year 680), when the Chalcedonian doctrine of Christ's two natures was filled out with an affirmation of his necessarily having two wills (thus against Monothelitism). But the more one examines the matter the greater the divisions in the "undivided Church" seem, even here.

As we have already noted, the fifth General Council was convoked by the Emperor Justinian to heal the split between the Monophysite and the Nestorian wings which the doctrinal agreement at Chalcedon had never in fact prevented. Long before the separation between the ancient churches of the East and the Catholic Church there was in fact a substantial division among the eastern Christians. In the middle of the sixth century it had fallen to the Byzantine emperor to seek ways of establishing Christian unity and doctrinal agreement. But we may surely go even further back, in quest of the "undivided Church". The Council of Chalcedon itself, that watershed and touchstone, held in the year 451, was convoked by an earlier emperor again to preserve and restore Christian unity. Although the Roman Church accepted the dogmatic decisions of Chalcedon, and a certain unity was maintained in the East, the fact is that many eastern Christians went their own non-Chalcedonian way. A considerable body of Syrian Orthodox, who thought that the Council of Chalcedon conceded too much to Nestorianism, survive to the present day (the Jacobites mentioned above). In the fourteenth century they suffered badly during the Mongol invasions, and again in the early twentieth century they were massacred by the Turks. In fact there are now five non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches for which the terminology is still somewhat fluid, since they are only now coming into the history books and statistics that form western Christian consciousness. They are sometimes called the Oriental Orthodox Churches, as distinct from the Byzantine Orthodox Churches (with whom they are of course no more in communion than they are with Rome); they are also referred to as the Old Orthodox Churches or the pre-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches. Divided as these churches have been from the Byzantine Orthodox as well as from the Roman Catholics since the middle of the fifth century, and as suspicious of aggression by Constantinople as Constantinople has ever been of aggression by Rome, their appearance, in multilateral discussions, has led to the discovery that the parting of the ways at Chalcedon may well have been a complete misunderstanding. Indeed the Armenians, who have long been classed as Monophysite, were not represented at the Council of Chalcedon, and repudiated it some fifty years later, at least partly for political reasons. It is thus questionable whether there ever was sufficient doctrinal basis for one of the most ancient divisions between the eastern churches.

But we need not stop with the divisions of the fifth century.

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In fact the first General Council of all, held at Nicaea in the year 325, was summoned by the Emperor Constantine in order to secure unity. The great arch that stands by the Colosseum, surrounded by the frenzy of Roman traffic, and depicting the drowning of Maxentius' troops and proclaiming that Constantine defeated him "by the prompting of the deity" (meaning the sun-god), is a memorial of the divided Church that the Emperor sought to reunite. Efforts to restore Christian unity thus may easily be traced back to the end of the third century. The next stage is to examine the state of the Church from (say) the heyday of Irenaeus until the end of the third century, to see if the undivided Church appears there. Beyond that, finally, there lies the Church of the New Testament period, which the dream of unity and the ecumenical vision might expect to find an inspiring source. If the differences between Christians, and Christian traditions, at that original stage, turn out to be as deep as the differences that it seems easy to trace in the subsequent history of the Church, one is surely faced with questions about the nature and the extent of *any* Christian unity.

Wedding in Solentiname

JOHN LYONS

After a quick breakfast, the long wooden table is cleared and wiped clean, ready to receive the corpse of the victim, a poor ignorant innocent. Little light enters the musty kitchen where all the meals are taken together. Through the side door near the orange tree, heavy with fruit (like a Christmas tree with the bulbs switched off) dark, agitated shadows can be seen. The early morning sun is just beginning to draw out a thin sweat. A band of young *campesinos,* brandishing various tools of destruction, like conspirators planning their attack on a hated dictator. Suddenly with a cheer they break up and head off in search of the appointed offering. There is a pagan gleam in their eyes, a wild joy as the pig with its front trotters tied together, is dragged by its hind legs through the grass to the execution spot. The string is then removed as a jeering circle is formed around the creature, a large meat knife catching the morning light, an axe, someone with a small revolver. Meanwhile the wood collected earlier has been piled up to make a fire, the flames of which are now licking upwards, crackling; and a huge bowl containing oil is placed over the fire in preparation for the *chicharrón* to be fried. The pig watches these pro-

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