

ORTHODOX BRETHERN

"Let God see and judge!" The shout resounded in the ears of the dumb-founded congregation as it watched him shake the dust from his feet and leave the church. The man who uttered this cry was Humbert of Mourmontiers, the Cardinal Bishop of Silva Candida. It was Saturday, July 16, 1054. The Cardinal had just excommunicated Michael Cerularius, the Patriarch of Constantinople in the Church of Holy Wisdom. In the opinion of many historians this event put the seal on the separation of the Eastern Church from the Church of the West.

The Orthodox Church—A General Description

By the words "Eastern Church" we do not mean to create the impression that the Orthodox or Eastern church is a single unified church corresponding to the Western Church ruled and guided by Pope Paul VI. Nor are we speaking of those heretical churches of the East, the Nestorians and the Monophysites. These churches had been separated from Rome long before the Cardinal of Silva Candida shook the dust from his feet in the Church of Holy Wisdom. Again, our attention is not focused on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite, which are united in faith and morals with the Church of Rome and are in communion with her. We are interested in the Orthodox Churches. These churches are in union with one another, although separated from Rome. There are approximately eighteen of these autocephalous (self-governing) churches which are united in a federation. And it is this federation which often receives the name Eastern Church or Orthodox Church.

The Christian Orthodox Church is not a form of Protestantism. On the contrary, all of these Orthodox Churches represent the authentic Catholic Christianity of the East as it was preached in the earlier centuries and modified by the history of subsequent ages. For the passing of years has led to a separation from and a varying opposition to the theological development and religious life of the Roman Catholic Church. Still, the Orthodox Churches have preserved the apostolic succession and most of the essentials of Christian doctrine and worship. Orthodox Bishops are true bishops. Their priests are truly "other Christs" who offer a true sacrifice each time they say Mass. The sacraments of the Eastern Orthodox Church are true sacraments.

There is, then, a great similarity between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, the separation remains. The reasons why the split between these two ancient churches has perdured for over 900 years can be found in history and in the doctrines of each church.

The History of the Eastern Orthodox Church

In the centuries following the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, the Universal Church was organized into five distinct parts called Patriarchates. Rome was the Patriarchate of the West. In the East there were Patriarchates at Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. During this period the patriarchates were administratively independent of the other. Each locally appointed its own patriarch; each had its own liturgy, discipline and customs.

There is evidence that at this time the Eastern Patriarchs recognized the Patriarch or Bishop of Rome as the successor of St. Peter. By reason of this fact, they were willing to agree that he possessed a primacy of jurisdiction, the extent of which however, was not clear. The Bishop of Rome was also considered to be the final court of appeal in doctrinal matters.

Nevertheless, friction between East and West began to mount at an early date. Temporary ruptures of communion became more and more frequent. The whole condition was aggravated by Constantinople's rise to power as the "new Rome." Eventually, a serious disagreement arose between Pope St. Nicholas I and Photius, who had become Patriarch of Constantinople in A.D. 852. This controversy, in which the dispute over the "filioque" played an important role, resulted in a cessation of communion between East and West. The cessation, however, was only temporary and communion was restored before the death of Photius in A.D. 891. Still, it remains a fact that the entire affair led to a growth of mutual distrust and jealousy.

What some historians consider to be the event that sealed the separation between the Eastern Church and the Church of Rome occurred 186 years later at a time when the Churches were enjoying an era of relative peace. Pope St. Leo IX was reigning in Rome; Michael Cerularius was the Patriarch of Constantinople. Patriarch Cerularius had labeled certain Western customs as anti-Christian, e.g., the use of unleavened bread at Communion. He had closed all the Latin Churches in Constantinople and removed the Pope's name from commemoration in the liturgy. Cardinal Humbert of Mourmontiers, one of the Papal legates to Constantinople, and the Patriarch definitely had a personality conflict. They just could not get

along with one another. The presence of Humbert served only to antagonize Cerularius, who avoided showing any signs of friendship toward him. Consequently, matters grew worse in spite of the Emperor's attempts to reconcile both parties. The climax was reached on July 16, 1054, when the Papal legate excommunicated the Patriarch and two of his legates. It is interesting to note that the excommunication took place when the Holy See was vacant. The Pope had died on April 19. What is more worthy of mention is this: the great Church of Constantinople was not, nor has it ever been excommunicated by the Holy See. In fact, the excommunication of Cerularius and his legates has never been confirmed by any Roman Pontiff, nor has it ever been repudiated.

Although this episode seems to have made definite the split between the Eastern and Western Churches, the actual separation of the Orthodox Church was a gradual movement. Slowly, other Byzantine Patriarchs began to follow the lead of the Patriarch of Constantinople. After 1472, there was no longer any doubt about the separation. In that year Constantinople repudiated the Florentine agreement of 1439. The facts seem to show, however, that in 1054 there was no intellectual necessity for the separation. Political ambitions, temperamental differences between East and West and the clashing personalities of the leading figures were the real causes.

The power of the Oecumenical Patriarch at Constantinople was never very strong (Cyprus had become an autonomous, self-ruling Church in A.D. 431 and Georgia the same in the seventh century). After 1054, this power became even weaker as more and more Churches became autocephalous in 1575. Russia declared itself autonomous in 1589; Greece did the same in 1833 and Bulgaria in 1870. There are other small independent Churches in Albania, Poland and Japan.

The Orthodox Church in America

Most Orthodox Churches in America are dependent upon the mother churches in Europe and Asia. In 1927 there was an attempt by certain Russian Orthodox Bishops in the United States to form an autocephalous North American Orthodox Church, which was to be a union of American Orthodox of every nationality. The plan, however, failed to receive recognition from the other autonomous Orthodox Churches and eventually collapsed.

The history of the Orthodox Church in America begins with the discovery of Alaska by the Russians. Russian monks began missionary work there in 1794. Soon after this territory became a bishopric. With the sale

of Alaska to the United States, the seat of the Bishop was moved to San Francisco and in 1905 it was transferred to New York.

Today, besides the Russian diocese, there are in the United States, Greek, Serbian, Rumanian and Bulgarian dioceses and an archdiocese dependent upon the Arabian speaking Patriarch of Antioch. The Orthodox Church can claim a total membership of about 3,000,000 people. All the national groups, with the exception of the Greeks, are gradually adopting English as the liturgical language. St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York receives students from all Orthodox communities in the United States and there is a Greek Theological School in Brookline, Massachusetts.

The Doctrine and Faith of the Orthodox Church

Although it can be asserted that there was no intellectual necessity for the separation of 1054, it cannot be said that intellectual beliefs play no part in the continuance of the break. Thus in order to discover why the separation remains, it will be necessary to examine the doctrinal beliefs of the Orthodox Church and contrast them with those of the Roman Catholic Church.

In any examination of the divergency of beliefs between these two churches, the tremendous similarity of faith must never be forgotten. In regards to most of the essentials, there is unity. Both churches are one in proclaiming Jesus Christ as Incarnate Lord and Savior. Each worships one God in three Divine Persons. The same Scriptures provide the basis for the teaching authority of each church. Both believe all contained in the Nicene Creed, if we abstract from the later addition of the "filioque." Both churches are in agreement that the sacraments are indispensable to Christian life and that death is not the end of all life for man.

The bond of union between the independent and autonomous Orthodox Churches is adherence to the doctrinal statements of the first seven ecumenical councils. Any dogma defined by these councils (the last was the Council of Nicea in A.D. 787) is binding upon the members of the Orthodox Church. The Creed of Nicea-Constantinople is also an unassailable source of dogma for Orthodox Christians. Any doctrine that does not fall within either of these two categories is not binding upon them.

Differences: Theology

According to the Eastern conception, the Church is primarily a worshipping community. Consequently, the theology of the East is mystical,

contemplative and unsystematic. It is strongly patristic and has not been developed to the extent that Western theology has. Every dogma must be believed. These, as we have said, are to be found in the statements of the first seven councils and the Creed. They usually find expression in the liturgy and include such truths as those concerned with the Incarnation and the Trinity. Because the Orthodox believe that there cannot be a true ecumenical council without the representation of the Church of Rome, the Orthodox Churches have proposed no new doctrines for the belief of the faithful. Consequently, doctrines disputed between East and West fall into one of the two other classifications of doctrine. *Theologumena* are statements made by venerated teachers of the Church and accepted by the faithful. These statements do not have the same authority as dogma and they cover such doctrines as the constitution of the Church, the nature of man, of sin and of grace. Into a third category fall theological opinions. These are free opinions of the members of the Orthodox Church and direct opposition may be found among the opinions proposed. The matter included within this classification is open to further discussion. The doctrine on the status of the Western Christians is a theological opinion which may vary from member to member. Moreover, it should be noted here, although we shall have cause to mention it again, that Orthodox theologians may hold any dogma defined by Rome since the schism without any fear of being condemned by their Church as a heretic.

Because Orthodox theology rests more on the authority of the Fathers of the Church than any philosophical system, it has acquired a social quality, usually lacking in the field of theology in the West. Since it is not necessary to be skilled in the terminology and methodology of philosophy, anyone, from the emperor down to the man in the street, can take an active and intelligent part in a theological discussion.

Differences: The Structure and Nature of the Church

Included in the litanies of the Orthodox Church is a prayer for the peace and good estate of the Holy *Churches* of God. It is the Orthodox opinion that the Catholic Church consists of many self-governing communities which are united in faith, but independent in their administration. The Orthodox may be said to have a eucharistic conception of the nature of the Church. Moreover, in accord with their temperament, they emphasize the community as opposed to the Western emphasis given to the individual. For the Orthodox, the Church is truly the body of Christ at the celebration of the Eucharist. Consequently, every local eucharistic commu-

nity is the whole church of Christ. The unity of these local churches is to be found in the sharing of the life of Christ's Mystical Body. Each church confesses substantially the same faith and receives the same sacraments. Therefore, Orthodox contend that they have unity, indeed, a unity which no visible authority ruling all the churches can in any way increase.

Everything is common in the church; there is nothing individual. Thus, the Holy Spirit abides in the whole body of the Church, wherein is found the infallibility of the church. There is no need for an individual infallibility. The truth of Christian dogma is guarded by the totality of the people of God. The declaration of the truth by a council depends upon the recognition of the whole church before it is held to be infallibly true. The Church testifies to the truth of the doctrine when it agrees with the council. It is, once more, the eucharistic fellowship of the Orthodox Christians which insures the Divine protection granting the total Church the ability to distinguish truth from error. Mutual love is the indispensable condition for communion with the Holy Spirit.

Orthodox theologians are willing to admit that the Church is founded upon Peter, i.e., every local church is, inasmuch as it adheres to the faith professed by Peter on the road to Caesarea Philippi. The Bishop of Rome, the Pope, is worthy of a primacy of honor, but he has no universal jurisdiction and he is not an infallible religious teacher.

There is, nevertheless, a hierarchical structure within the Orthodox Church. Bishops and priests have their clearly defined sacerdotal functions. They are responsible for ecclesiastical administration and for maintaining sound Christian teaching. Local and general councils and synods are periodically convoked, but their decisions depend upon the endorsement of the whole community for their recognition as the voice of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

The conflicting doctrines on the nature of the Church is the most important dispute existing today between the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Included in this question is the primacy proper to the Bishop of Rome. Eva-Marie Jung, in an interview with the Russian observers at the Second Vatican Council, reports their spokesman as remarking on the possibility of the union of all Christians:

Just as all Orthodox Churches are one in faith and doctrine, so all Christian Churches could be. An organized unity is not necessary. On the basis of his historical importance we would

willingly acknowledge a primacy of honor—a pre-eminence to the Pope—but, *inter pares*.*

As the author observes, this point is the "Alpha and Omega" of all conversations with the Russian Orthodox.

Differences: The "Filioque"

Undoubtedly, the most famous and publicized dispute between the Church of Rome and the Orthodox Church is that concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit. For the Orthodox, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son. The Orthodox maintain that there is a distinction between the sending in time by the Son and the eternal procession or emanation from the Father. Today, some Orthodox scholars are willing to concede that the addition of the word "filioque" (used to explain the Roman understanding of the doctrine) to the Nicene Creed did not and does not constitute heresy. The theological differences surrounding the entire question can be reconciled. Witness the Councils of Bari, Lyons and Florence. Hence, it is the general opinion at present that the famous "filioque" controversy is no longer a major obstacle to the unity of Orthodox and Roman Catholics.

Differences: The Eucharist

While the Orthodox Churches believe in the real, objective presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, there exists a theological opinion on the exact moment of transubstantiation, which is opposed to the doctrine of the Roman Church. This opinion states that the change from bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ is not effected by the words of institution alone (This is my Body, etc.), but that a subsequent invocation of the Holy Spirit called the *Epiclesis* is essential and that the lack of it in the Roman Mass is a grave defect. However, the exact moment of the change has never been defined by the Orthodox Church and consequently, diverse opinions, even that of the Catholic Church, may be held by Orthodox Christians.

Other Differences

Minor divergences between the beliefs of the two ancient churches

* Jung, Eva-Marie. "Table Talk with the Russian Observers," *Catholic World* (Feb. 1963), pp. 278.

can be found in their respective doctrines on Purgatory, Penance and prayers for the departed. There are very slight differences existing between the Marian doctrines of the two Churches. The Orthodox Church, moreover, will grant divorce for reasons of adultery, apostasy, insanity and desertion.

Possibility of the Reunion of Orthodox and Roman Catholics

Do these doctrinal differences represent an obstacle impossible to overcome? Is there any hope for the eventual reunion of these churches which are so similar? First, it must be emphasized that the dogmatic barrier to reunion exists on the Roman Catholic side and not on the Greco-Russian or Orthodox side. Since the schism, the Roman Catholic Church has infallibly defined most of the questions which have been argued by the Greeks and Latins and are being disputed by them right up to the present time. Thus, the primacy of jurisdiction by Divine Right, the personal infallibility of the Bishop of Rome, the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and from the Son are dogmas of faith to be believed by every Roman Catholic. The Orthodox Churches, however, possess no fixed and definite teaching on any of the doctrinal questions which have been controverted in the past or are being controverted today with Roman Catholics. (The one possible exception to this could be the "filioque" which may be a dogma for the Orthodox. But, there is no agreement on this point.) As a result, the Orthodox faithful are free to accept or reject the Roman Catholic or Orthodox position in regard to any of the doctrines we have mentioned.

Such a situation definitely increases the hope for reunion. Moreover, there are other encouraging signs. Pope John XXIII has convoked a council which has church unity as one of its major objectives. Today, Orthodox Christians are aware that they should be concerned about the unity of all Christians. Hence, Greco-Russian Orthodox, clergy and people, are praying for church unity as are their counterparts of the Roman Church.

Nevertheless, the doctrinal differences remain. There is the dogmatic barrier on the side of the West which cannot be removed. The Russians will not easily accept the Roman Catholic idea of the social structure of the Church. Some say that the Greeks still feel strongly about the Orthodox doctrine on the procession of the Holy Spirit. Others see the necessity of debating the question of the *Epiclesis*. From the point of view of theological discussion, the road ahead looks hard and long.

But Christian unity is not to be achieved by theological discussion

alone. It will result primarily from the grace of God, from the prayers and the sacrifices of the faithful of both Churches. It seems, moreover, that it is God's will that these prayers should be directed in great measure to His Mother, the Queen of Heaven and Earth. The Blessed Mother is venerated strongly by both Churches. Aside from some minor variations they are in perfect harmony in regard to Marian doctrine. Mary is venerated by the Orthodox as *Theotokos* or *Bogorditza*, the one who gave birth to God. She is constantly invoked in Eastern liturgical and private prayers. Orthodox Christians love the Blessed Mother, not only as the Mother of Christ, but also, as the mother of all mankind. Rather than being an obstacle to the reunion of Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, Mary, the **Mother of God**, the *Theotokos*, is one of the greatest examples of the harmony now existing between them.

Finally, we can ask who will bring these Churches together? Can we Christians be responsible in any way for the unity of all Christians? Pope John XXIII answers in his Christmas message of 1962:

That they may be one. This is the design of Divine Providence that we must put into effect, venerable brothers, and it rests a serious obligation upon each one's conscience.

On the day of judgment, particular and general, each one will be asked, not whether he achieved unity, but whether he prayed and worked and suffered for it.

—John V. Walsh, O.P.

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Thank you,
THE EDITORS