



Istina: Reunion with the Orthodox

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Geographically speaking, "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet?" True. Regardless of what anyone does, this will always be the state of affairs. However from the East and West of Christ's Kingdom come definite attempts of uniting and hopeful prospects of searching out the way to join these two. Here is a report on such a group searching for the bridge.

Resounding from all portions of the world, the cry for the unity of all Christians once again reaches the ears of religious men everywhere. Instrumental in this re-awakening was, without doubt, the convening of the Second Vatican Council in 1958. Ecumenical stirrings within as well as outside the Catholic Church have again emerged in the spirit of Christian reunification. A false impression is sometimes had that attempts toward Christian unification are something new, something revolutionary. This, of course, is not true. Lambeth Conferences (1920), International Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910), and the Maline Conversations in

Belgium are but a few of the steps which formed the core of Ecumenism during the earlier part of this century. Another movement which had its inception during this period and flourishes even more today is *Centre Istina*.

Formative Years:

Thirty-seven years ago *Centre Istina* was founded at Lille, in the northern part of France. Its purpose was to inquire into the knotty problem of unity in order to search out the various means which would most surely effect the long sought reunification of the Christian bodies. In particular, the hope of the *Centre* was to re-weave that fabric rent by the Great Schism, and thus reunite the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church. The initial steps toward the founding of the *Centre* were taken by the French Dominican Fr. Henri-Jean Omez who was superior at the seminary for Russian Catholics of the Byzantine Rite. *Centre Istina* was affiliated to this seminary until 1932 when the Jesuits opened the *Collegium Russicum* in Rome, thereby terminating the need for the seminary at Lille. The *Centre* remained at Lille until the Istina Fathers sought and received permission from the Holy See to move their operation to Paris.

Upon arrival in Paris the Fathers found themselves heirs to the *Mission Catholique Russe* established in earlier years by a Russian Catholic bishop. Looking at the common goal of both *Istina* and this society, the Holy See determined to solidify their respective efforts by the union of the two, since both organizations dealt with the Russian aspect of ecumenism. However, this merger proved to be unsatisfactory due to the insufficiency of manpower. Because of this difficulty an appeal was made to Rome by the Istina Fathers for their separation. Dissolvement was granted in 1947 and *Centre Istina* became independent once again. Upon this dissolution, the *Mission Catholique Russe* was again entrusted to the care of a priest of the Russian Rite. Instrumental in this separation was the then Archbishop Roncalli, Papal Nuncio to France, who, seeing the need for this action, assisted the *Istina* Fathers and aided in the finding of a new location for the *Centre*.

At first, the *Centre* devoted itself mainly to the particular religious problems of Russia. Hence, the name *Istina* which is the Russian word for the motto of the Dominican Order: Veritas, meaning Truth. *Istina* focused its attention on the spiritual and material welfare of the countless Russian Christians of the Orthodox confession with an eye toward ultimate reunion with Rome.

The *Istina* Fathers devoted themselves to studying Russia, her people, and the relationship between Church and State. This was not a detached, statistical text book study but, rather, a dynamic, personal encounter with Russian emigrants revealing the various situations as they existed within Russia. In this way, the door was opened to a more meaningful approach to the religious problems with which *Istina* would deal in the future. Through this investigation the *Istina* Fathers came to realize more vividly that Orthodoxy was not a Russian problem alone, but that Russia was a large segment of a whole—the Orthodox body which, with its learned theologians and great holiness exemplified in her monasticism, and the beauty of her liturgical ceremonies, reaches to all corners of the globe. Performed by priests and people praying together, the various ceremonies are executed with a splendor and devotion enviable to many a westerner. Orthodoxy sees man, above all else, as a liturgical creature who is most truly himself when he glorifies God and who discovers his personal perfection in this act of worship. A full participation by all through hymns and litanies is rendered to God in the comprehensible language of the place of worship. Seeing these common characteristics among all the Orthodox churches, *Istina's* aim toward reunification of the Russian Orthodox was altered to include not only Russia but the whole world of Orthodoxy.

Once having recognized the breadth of Orthodoxy, the work of the *Centre* stretched forth its arms and also embraced the Greek Orthodox church, both in the Balkan countries as well as those in the Near East. Reflecting upon the vastness of Orthodoxy, the *Istina* Fathers could not overlook the fact that many Orthodox churches, particularly noticeable during the past twenty-five years, had united themselves with the Protestant movement toward Christian Unity—the World Council of Churches. Because of their identity with this movement, *Istina* found it necessary to observe the work of the World Council and to participate in its deliberations to the extent permissible. Restrictions in regard to Catholic participation in the ecumenical movement were issued from the Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome in 1949: "The Catholic Church takes no actual part in 'ecumenical' conversations, yet, she has despite the fact, never ceased to pursue with deepest concern and promote with prayer to God every endeavor to bring about what was so close to the Heart of Christ, that all who believe in Him 'may be made perfect in unity.'" The participation by the *Istina* Fathers at the World Council of Churches may in some way be paralleled to the cooperation among the Fathers of the Sec-

ond Vatican Council with the great number of observers representing most of the Christian confessions separated from Rome.

Istina Today

Presently at *Istina* there are four Dominican Fathers who are permanently on the staff of the *Centre*. They are Fr. Dumont, Fr. LeGuillou, Fr. Goia and Fr. Cowley. Each of these men outstanding in his own right, contribute to the work of the *Centre* valuable knowledge and experience which he has acquired in his individual field. Fr. Dumont, besides being overall director of *Centre Istina*, heads the Russian section being fluent in that language. He edits two of the periodicals published by the *Centre* and is also a consultant to the Unity Secretariat at Rome. Furthermore, not long after the closing of St. Basil's seminary, Fr. Dumont was made an archimandrite of the Oriental Rite which accounts for his title of "Monsignor." Fr. LeGuillou being both adroit in the Greek language as well as possessing a vast knowledge of the culture of the Greek people heads that section of the *Centre* which confronts the Greek Orthodox Church. Besides these activities which he handles for the *Centre*, Fr. LeGuillou lectures on Missiology at the Dominican House of Studies, Le Saulchoir. Fr. Goia, a Rumanian of the Oriental Rite, whose knowledge both of languages and the cultural atmosphere of the Balkan countries renders him an able evaluator of church development in that area of the world. Fr. Cowley, surprisingly enough, came to *Istina* from England to enter the Paris Province of the Dominican Order. Formerly, Fr. Cowley was an Anglican priest. Due to his knowledge and familiarity both with England and the North American continent, Fr. Cowley ably concentrates his efforts in behalf of the *Centre* on the western hemisphere. His work is centered about the "Life and Work" aspect of ecumenism which is in direct contrast to the tendency of *Istina* in the past of placing more of an emphasis on the "Faith and Order" aspect. Fr. Dumont, while stressing the undeniable need for the latter also points out to the Fathers the need and advantage which is seen in the union of the two. In the persons of this concentration of dedicated men representing the four corners of the earth, there is emphasized with clarity the universal nature of the tasks with which *Istina* is engaged. From this essential nucleus *Istina* looks forward with great hope in the various fields of endeavor. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), and UNICEF are two instances of international organizations, non-religious in nature, with which *Istina* is also associated. Discussions are held among Christians

in these organizations with the hope of airing common problems which, until now, have been chiefly centered about civil affairs, but hopes are high that soon the problem of the Christian ethic will be discussed.

Among the diverse accomplishments of *Istina*, the Fathers of the *Centre* also publish a periodical whose content defines the sphere of their activities. Originally when the work of the Centre was restricted to the Russian Orthodox Christians alone, the periodical was entitled *Russie et Chrétienté*. With the extension of activities to the whole of Orthodoxy, the publication was renamed *Istina* in 1954. The subject matter treated in *Istina* can be divided as follows: (1) Russia and Christianity, (2) Eastern Christianity, (3) East and West, and (4) Ecumenical problems. Recently a monthly bulletin, less technical in style than *Istina*, made its appearance and has been received with great enthusiasm by many Catholics who have an ever increasing interest in the field of Christian unity.¹ The task of reuniting a divided Christianity is burdensome and sometimes seemingly insurmountable obstacles have to be faced. Nonetheless, such is the work set by *Istina* for herself. A task described by Fr. Dumont as;

"... a delicate work since it concerns the mystery of Christ in His Church. It is also difficult work, in which for most of the time one has to work as a pioneer, finding fresh approaches, discerning the authentic traditions among the clutter of religious routine, separating the good grain from the chaff, even in matters of doctrine; stripping oneself of oneself in order to become an Eastern among Easterns, not simply by borrowing their practices but in living in the depth their spiritual traditions so as to understand and love the best in them."²

Conclusion:

An attempt has been made to give an account of one segment of ecumenical work undertaken by the Paris Province of the Dominican Order. What of the future at *Istina*? Although all official contact with the non-Catholic Christian bodies will be channeled through the Secretariat for Christian Unity at Rome, the work of the *Centre* as assigned and guided by the Secretariat will continue and promises to flourish even more than in the past due to the impetus of our times. The *Centre* always has and will in the future be ever ready to adapt itself to the needs of the Church

¹ *Vers l'unité Chrétienne*.

² *Cbrysostom*, Autumn 1960, Marian House, London, C. J. Dumont, O.P., "*Istina*" Center of Studies.

in the field of ecumenism. It will continue to be a source of study, documentation and doctrinal discussion.

In view of the great new surge in the spirit of man to answer to the call for unity of heart and mind among all Christians we cannot but look with great esteem to *Centre Istina* for shouldering its share of the rapprochement toward a unified Christianity.