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The Holy Orthodox Eastern Church.

BY THE REV. F. G. COLE, M.A.

THE Eastern Church should be of great interest to English Churchmen in that it numbers 90,000,000 of our fellow-Christians who are Catholics, but not Roman Catholics. And, besides this, the study of the Oriental Church possesses another value: she represents a stage through which the Western Church has passed, and, therefore, by comparing and contrasting the two great divisions of the Church, we gain some light on questions that are debated among us to-day.

There are now only three theories of Episcopal Church government. The Roman theory is that the Church is a despotism; that the supreme government has been entrusted to the Pope, and that the Bishops are merely his delegates. The Anglican idea of Church government is St. Cyprian's—that the Church is a republic, and that the supreme government has been entrusted to the Bishops collectively, and that their rule is exercised by each Bishop individually in his own diocese. Neither of these theories is that of the Eastern Church.

“By the East,” says Dr. Neale, “the Church was, and still is, regarded as an unmixed oligarchy; based, indeed, on the great body of Prelates, but gradually, through the various stages of Bishops, Metropolitans, Primates, and Exarchs, finding its sovereignty in the five patriarchal thrones.” Each Patriarch holds in his own territory the position which the Gallican theory assigned to the Pope in the Church universal—that is, each is not amenable to the jurisdiction of his brethren, and may only be deposed, if he err, by an Œcumenical Synod. The Church, according to the Eastern theory, rested upon the pillars of the five Patriarchs, and now, since the Patriarch of Rome has become a shaky, if not a fallen pillar, the Church is that community which is governed by the four remaining Patriarchs, those of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem.

They once possessed a fifth Patriarch, of Moscow, who was supposed to take the place of the lapsed Patriarch of Rome,

and in connection with him I must give a short sketch of the Russian Church.

The conversion of Russia took place finally in 992, through the exertions of Greek missionaries, and for six centuries from that time the Church was governed by a Metropolitan, subject to the Patriarch of Constantinople. When, however, Constantinople was taken by the Turks, it was thought inconvenient that Russia should be subject to a Patriarch who was in the hands of the infidel; and so, in 1582, Job, the forty-sixth Metropolitan, was raised to the dignity of Patriarch of Moscow, thus making up the number of the Patriarchs once more to five. This arrangement lasted for more than a hundred years, during which time ten Patriarchs reigned at Moscow and possessed immense power; in fact, so great was their splendour and growing power, that when the Patriarch Adrian died in 1701, Peter the Great determined that he should be the last of them, and forbade the appointment of a successor. In 1721 he established instead the Holy Governing Synod. It consists of five or six Bishops, three priests, and a layman as Procurator, all appointed by the Czar. The Russian Church is now practically independent, for although she owes a shadowy allegiance to Constantinople, the whole Eastern Church has assigned patriarchal rank to the Holy Synod, and its decrees have the same authority as those of a Patriarch.

Of the 90,000,000 Orthodox Eastern Christians, about 75,000,000 belong to the Russian Church; 10,000,000 are subject to Constantinople; 2,000,000 to the newly-formed Holy Synod of Athens; and there are 3,000,000 Roumanians and Servians; while the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem number their people by the thousands only. And so, for all practical purposes, the Russian Church, which numbers seven out of eight Eastern Christians, may be taken as representative of the Eastern Church. The points in which she differs from the rest of the East are very slight; indeed, there is practically identity of doctrine and discipline and ritual throughout the whole Orthodox Church.

The only real and vital doctrinal difference between the Greek and Roman Churches, if we allow the question of Papal supremacy to be a matter of discipline only, is that concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit. And it is the Eastern subtlety of intellect and love of abstract thought that underlies the problem of the Filioque clause. The Eastern, equally with ourselves, believes that the Holy Ghost proceeds *also from the Son*, as far as the mission of the Holy Ghost to us mortals in time, but he wants to penetrate into that abyss, that eternity where God dwelt before the world was. He not only wants to know something of God in relation to man, but what God is in Himself. And so, while perfectly orthodox on the subject of the Trinity, his subtle mind sees danger in that addition to the creed of Nicæa which asserts that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son. He believes that the statement that He proceeds from the Father alone guards the unity of the Godhead by establishing one fount of Deity. The East and West can sing the Creed together, for they are both orthodox; but while their voices blend in equal volume as they say, "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God," we seem to hear the deep bass of the East above the West in the next clause, as they thunder forth, "and yet there are not three Gods, but one God." In many respects the English Church during the past fifty years has been returning from exclusively Western dogma to the more subtle theology of the East. The reaction from a forensic view of the Atonement, the conception of the unity of creation as summed up in Christ, the prominence given to the doctrine of the Incarnation, the balancing of the Pauline theology by that of St. John, all that movement which found an exponent in Bishop Westcott, signify a return from the theology of Anselm and Augustine to that of St. Athanasius and the Greek Fathers.

The East, brooding over the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, certainly emphasizes the unity more than the West. This is due partly to the difference between the genius of the Greek

and Latin tongues, for the word *ὑπόστασις* conveys a different impression from that given by the Latin *persona*. And yet nothing is farther from the truth than the idea which Rome tries to insinuate—that the Eastern Church is Sabellian. She simply has a clearer, or, at any rate, a different, conception of the unity of the Trinity. And, I think, it is not correct to say that the chief objection which the Eastern Church has to the Filioque clause is its unlawful interpolation, for she has a deeper reason—she feels instinctively, although she cannot express her meaning clearly in human language, that she is bearing witness against what seems to her an unconscious Tritheism in the West to the great Catholic doctrine of the unity of the Blessed Trinity.

I can but touch on this great subject, and now turn to the points of difference in minor matters between East and West; and I have chosen for the most part such points as seem to bear a little on Anglican theology, taking them as they occur in order, as we review the seven mysteries of the Eastern Church.

I. *Baptism*.—Baptism is administered throughout the East by trine immersion. Affusion is only allowed in the case of a clinical baptism in extreme illness. Until a hundred years ago converts from the Western Church were rebaptized. The Russian Church was the first to admit such converts without a repetition of Baptism, but the Patriarchs of Constantinople were for some time more conservative, and many individuals among them are still doubtful. As far as one can get at their opinion, it seems to be something of this kind, however illogical and untheological it may sound in our ears—that we Westerns have gone through a ceremony which is sufficient for our regeneration, and which need not be supplemented by immersion in the case of converts, but which is not the Baptism to which it would be safe to entrust the salvation of a real orthodox Eastern.

The form of words used by Easterns in administering Baptism is: “N——, the servant of God, is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,

now and for ever, and to ages of ages. Amen." Latin writers have objected to this form, while Easterns have retorted that our formula shows egotism on the part of the baptizer. But all respectable theologians have agreed that either form is valid.

2. *The Mystery of Holy Chrism*, or Confirmation, is administered immediately after Baptism by the priest, who uses oil blessed previously by the Bishop. The essential part of the ceremony is the anointing of the child in several places with the accompanying words : "The seal of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Here is a divergence from Western practice, both as to the ordinary minister of the rite and the time of the ceremony. In confirming infants the Eastern Church retains a practice of those centuries of the Church when infant Baptism was held to imply, as a logical sequence, infant Confirmation. The practice of infant Confirmation long remained in the West ; it was the invariable custom, whenever the Bishop himself was the minister of Baptism, and this in earlier times was more frequently the case than in the present day. Queen Elizabeth is said to have been confirmed when three days old by the Bishop who baptized her.

The Eastern practice for priests invariably to give Confirmation seems to have originated from the difficulty of having a Bishop always present to confirm infants, and so a dispensation was given to the priest to use the oil blessed by the Bishop. Roman theologians of the present day for the most part allow that a priest can confirm by dispensation. This dispensation is rarely or never given ; yet the principle is there. And so we may account for the Eastern practice by supposing that what in the West is an occasional exception has there become the universal rule—namely, that the Bishop should confirm, as it were, at second hand, using the priest as his instrument or deputy to apply the oil which he has blessed.

Infant Communion follows immediately after Confirmation. This custom was also prevalent in the West, being mentioned by Tertullian, Augustine, and many early Fathers, and was

not finally discontinued in the West until the Council of Trent.

3. *The Mystery of the Holy Eucharist.*—The Eastern doctrine was thus defined at the Synod of Bethlehem in 1672: That “after the consecration the bread is transubstantiated, transmuted, and transformed into the very true body of our Lord which was born in Bethlehem of the most pure Virgin, baptized in the river Jordan, suffered, and was buried, rose again, ascended into heaven, sitteth on the right hand of the Father, shall come again in the clouds of heaven; and that the wine is converted and transubstantiated into the very true blood of the Lord, which was shed for the life of the world when He suffered upon the Cross. Further, we believe that, after the consecration of the bread and wine, the substance of the bread and wine no longer remains, but the very body and blood of our Lord under the accidents of bread and wine.”

The Russian Bishops were not present at the Synod of Bethlehem, but they accepted its articles, including the one on transubstantiation, with one noteworthy reservation; for when, a hundred years afterwards, the Russians were preparing an authoritative Catechism, they edited the declaration with an important difference—they left out the word “substance” (“the bread and wine no longer remain”), and, instead of using the word “accidents,” they say “under the appearance and form of bread and wine.” So that the Eastern Church’s universally accepted doctrine of transubstantiation is equivalent to that of the Lateran Council, and does not, like the Council of Trent, involve the Aristotellian teaching as to substance and accident.

The consecration is held to be completed by the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the Elements, over which our Lord’s words of institution have been previously recited. If either of these two things be absent, they believe that, as far as its consecration by an Eastern priest is concerned, the Sacrament would not be valid. They do not, however, condemn the Western form, holding either that the invocation is implied, or

that in some mysterious way it is sufficient for the Western Church.

The bread and the wine are administered to the clergy separately as with us ; but for the Communion of the laity the bread is placed in the chalice, and both are administered together in a spoon, the people standing with their hands crossed upon their breasts. The words of administration are : “ N——, the servant of God, is made partaker of the pure and holy body and blood of the Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins and life everlasting.”

The custom in the West for the priest to communicate standing may be a relic of this older use.

There are two languages in use in the East for the Liturgy. In Russia and in other Slav nations the language is Old Slavonic, which differs from Modern Russ about as much as the language of Chaucer differs from Modern English. In the rest of the Eastern Church the language is Classical Greek, which is easily understood by modern Greeks, but is an entirely unknown tongue to the Syrians and Arabs of the three oldest patriarchates.

The Eastern Church has always used leavened bread in the Eucharist. The controversy on this matter is very interesting. I can but give you the conclusions to which I have arrived. One is that our Lord at the institution of the Sacrament used unleavened bread. That is not so obvious as one might be inclined to believe, as the matter is complicated by the apparent discrepancy between St. John and the Synoptists as to the date of the Passover (whether the Last Supper was the Passover, or its preparation) ; but I think we may take it for granted that our Lord used unleavened bread. The other conclusion that seems forced upon one is that during the first thousand years the East universally, and the West for the most part, used leavened bread. This can only be accounted for by the supposition that some burning question raised by the Judaizing party made it desirable to differentiate the Christian Eucharist from the Jewish Passover. Indeed, many Roman writers admit that

the West did use leavened bread, but justify their present use of unleavened or wafer bread on the ground that it is a return, in the teeth of Church custom, when that custom is no longer necessary, to the pure unleavened bread which was used by our Lord Himself at the institution of the Eucharist.

4. *Penance*.—"Penitence is a mystery, in which he who confesses his sin is, on the outward declaration of the priest, inwardly loosed from his sin by Jesus Christ Himself." Such is the definition of the Russian Catechism. I have seen it stated that the Eastern Church is satisfied with a general confession in public. This is not the case. The Eastern Church requires auricular confession four times a year, but very few except the clergy go to confession oftener than once a year. The form of absolution is precatory, although in Russia there is added, "And I, an unworthy priest, absolve thee from all thy sins" (a Latin interpolation according to Dr. King). But the fact that the form is precatory does not show any difference between the Latin and the Greek doctrine as to the Sacrament of Penance, it being regarded in both Churches as the normal means of the remission of post-Baptismal sin. In Russia, however, the priest is now content with going over the Commandments, and asking the penitent against which he had sinned, so that confession is perhaps less inquisitorial than in the Latin Church.

5. *Ordination*.—The service is short and simple, and there is no delivery of the chalice and paten to the newly-ordained priest. There are minor orders of subdeacon, singer, and reader.

6. *Marriage*.—The parish priests, or white clergy, must be married, and before ordination. This rule seems to have been framed in the interests of the monasteries. For since the Bishops must be unmarried, it is necessary that these should be taken from the monastic, or black clergy, who form a separate and more learned caste. A parish priest whose wife died was formerly compelled to leave his cure and retire into a monastery, but this canon was repealed in 1667. A few unmarried men have been placed in charge of parishes of late years. Perhaps this

marks a revolt on the part of Eastern clergy against the grievous yoke of compulsory matrimony. No ecclesiastical person may marry twice or after ordination ; if he does so, he is degraded from the priesthood, and compelled to serve as a common soldier in the army.

Second marriages, even among the laity, are discouraged by the Eastern Church ; a third marriage is looked upon with even more disfavour, and a fourth marriage is forbidden. This prejudice against second marriages, which is universal in the East and very ancient, seems to confirm the opinion of many scholars that the direction of St. Paul to Timothy as to a priest or deacon being the husband of one wife is a prohibition, not of polygamy, but of remarriage.

While we are considering the question of marriage, we must deplore the facility with which divorces are granted in the East. Marriage is dissolved not only for adultery, but even when one of the parties is imprisoned for three years, or has been absent five years. The difference between the practice of East and West is to be accounted for by the fact that when Constantinople became the seat of the Emperor, the Eastern Church was less free than the Western to frame her own canons, and was compelled to incorporate the Roman law as to divorce, which was laid down in the Code of Justinian. The Eastern ideal is the same as ours. "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder" occurs at least three times in the service of Matrimonial Coronation.

7. *Prayer Oil*.—The seventh mystery of the Eastern Church differs from the extreme unction of the Latins in that it continues the practice of the Early Church in anointing the sick in order that they may be healed, and it is not regarded chiefly as a preparation for death. It is supposed to be administered by seven priests, on the ground that the Epistle of St. James says that the sick man is to call for the *elders* of the Church. Dr. Neale says that there must be three at least, but probably one usually suffices.

Two questions remain, and with these I conclude. Does

the Eastern Church claim, like Rome, to be the sole Church? What are the prospects of intercommunion with our Church?

If I were required to give a direct answer to these questions, I should say that, although not committed to any authoritative pronouncement on the subject, most Easterns believe that their Church is the Church in as exclusive a sense as that in which Rome makes a similar claim, and that there is little, if any, chance of any formal intercommunion between the Greek and Anglican communions.

But we shall get the best view of the situation if we contrast the genius of the Greek and Roman Churches. And this we can do by briefly reviewing the titles by which they each like best to be known, which are a key to their character, and gathering from these the nature of their respective claims. The East is Orthodox; Rome is Catholic. The one claims to be the true Church because she holds the right faith; the other claims to be the true Church because she is the Divine Society. The East has thought rightly on the truths of religion; Rome has framed the true *Civitas dea*. And so the claim of the East to be the true Church does not involve, like that of Rome, the claim to universal sovereignty and territorial jurisdiction. "Why is the Church called Eastern?" says the Russian Catechism. Because orthodox Christians are chiefly to be found in the East. That shows the attitude of the Easterns towards the rest of the Church. Wherever orthodox people are there is the Church. Hence the Eastern ideal is to have the right faith, while with Rome the chief thing is membership in the one body. To the Eastern it does not matter what you are or where you are—whether your Orders be valid or invalid, whether you have mission or not—so long as you are not orthodox. Indeed, from such a lofty standard of orthodoxy does she look down on the rest of the Church that all our divisions seem to be but interesting varieties of the Western heresy, all due to the rationalizing of the Pope, who, by using *his* reason on matters of faith, opened the flood-gates to other and worse rationalists. Secure in her own orthodoxy, as the true Church of Christ and His Apostles

and the first seven General Councils, she sees outside her own communion a number of people of various stages of heterodoxy, and regards these Christ-loving people with a genially tolerant eye. For, strange to say, there is a vein of undenominationalism running through the Eastern Church. "We are all going to the same place" seems a strange phrase on the lips of a Church of so many deep anathemas. But a spirit of tolerance is either innate in the Easterns, or it has been forced upon them by persecution. And so one cannot interpret any advances individual Easterns have made towards Anglicans as showing that they really understand our position or the claims we make to be a branch of the Catholic Church; in fact, from the conversations which Mr. Henry Palmer had with Russian ecclesiastics, it seemed that they could not grasp our Anglican position at all. To them Canterbury was at best a rebellious Exarch; the English Church an apostasy from an apostasy. And it is only individuals among them who have made any advances towards us. And in their case it is due to Oriental politeness, or to Oriental policy, or to that tolerance to which allusion has been made. As things are at present, I fear that a real formal intercommunion between the Anglican and Eastern Churches would be as distasteful to the people—the laity especially—of Greece and Russia as it would be to the Orangemen of Liverpool on our side.

Great and seemingly insuperable as are the obstacles that prevent reunion in the West, greater still would be the difficulties on both sides in bringing about intercommunion between us and the changeless East. And if other obstacles could be got over, there is no doubt that the Filioque clause would stand in the way. However true it be, it was an unlawful interpolation, and no lasting intercommunion with the East will ever take place until the Filioque clause be omitted from the Creed.

