



Regaining the Equilibrium of the Church

Introduction

The Church is one because she is the one Body united with the Father in the person of Jesus Christ, and animated by the one Spirit of life and love. She is also one because of her vocation to praise—with one mind and one heart—the Holy Name of the Trinity.

The Church: East and West

From the very beginning, the genius of two civilizations, the Greek and the Latin, created and developed two currents of thought and two manners of life in Christ. One was called Eastern (or Orthodox or Byzantine or Greek), the other Western (or Catholic or Roman or Latin).

The former is largely mystical, emphasizing the mystery of God; the latter is more legalistic and realistically practical. The Eastern Church spirit is popular, spontaneous, and improvising, while the Western tends to be rather juridical and methodical: its essence is clarity and systematiza-

tion. The Eastern Church is awed by the incomprehensibility of God, by the mysteries of His mercy, His Incarnation, and our “transformation” and identification with Him. The Western, on the other hand, has been more concerned with the humanity of Christ, with His heart of flesh and blood.

This difference of attitude between the Eastern and the Western is particularly noticeable when it comes to defining the nature of the Church and its organizing government. Those of the East view the Church as a reality that transcends immediate experience, as a mystery of fellowship. For the West, the Church is mainly a visible society dependent on juridical rules.

Respect and Acceptance

For the first thousand years of the life of the Church these differences were recognized; each one respected and accepted the other’s orientation. Thus the Church of the East lived in har-

mony and peace with the Church of the West. At certain times this harmony was disturbed by accidents of history that created temporary hatreds and estrangements. But as soon as the psychological and historical impact of the event had time to subside, the hatreds were forgotten and unity and love were restored.

The Breaking Point

Until recent time, the breaking point between East and West was seen to coincide with the conflict that opposed Michael Cerularius of Constantinople and Cardinal Humbert, the Legate of the Pope of Rome, in their discussion on the doctrinal expression of the procession of the Holy Spirit.

The West held that the Holy Spirit proceeds “from the Father and the Son,” or “*Filioque*” in Latin. The East held that He proceeds “from the Father” or “from the Father through the Son.” Whatever is behind the philosophical concept of these expressions, the East considered the addition of the word “*Filioque*” to the Nicene Creed as an abuse, and consequently in error. It was held that no party on his own had the right to add to the Creed any word or dogmatic expression without the decision of an Ecumenical Council.

Another difficulty that one time inflamed the passions of Greeks and Latins was the question of



“azymes,” or the kind of bread used at Divine Liturgy. The East used leavened bread, the West unleavened.

Michael Cerularius of Constantinople, all wrapped up in his Byzantine traditions, could not conceive of any other practice or dogmatic expression than his own. Cardinal Humbert, the representative of the Pope of Rome, was no less uncompromising and stubborn. In a gesture of unbelievable misunderstanding and boorishness, Humbert hurled an excommunication against the Church of Constantinople in 1054. In reaction, Michael Cerularius excommunicated the Church of Rome!

Historians now see in this incident more of a clash of personalities than of real doctrinal dispute. Doctrine was but a screen to hide political ambitions and national pride. This event was hardly unnoticed by contemporaries. Peter, the Patriarch of Antioch, wrote to Cerularius reminding him that “after all, these Latins are our brothers.” Soon after the mutual excommunications, Cerularius and the Pope of Rome (John VIII) became better friends than any previous Pope or Patriarch. And some 40 years later, in 1098, Pope Urban II reminded the Latin Crusaders that they would be among many peoples of the East: “You are brothers ...you are children of the same Christ and the same Church.”



Up to the twelfth century, East and West thought of themselves as perfectly catholic, as both perfectly orthodox, as perfectly one in Christ.

The Balance Lost

As long as Byzantines and Romans remained united in Christ, theological equilibrium and harmony in personal relations could be maintained while their differences [in how they expressed the Faith] were both understood and respected. But as soon as they became estranged, especially under the influence of the Crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the balance was lost.

Differences hardened into rigid positions, which made any further understanding and cooperation impossible without some kind of miraculous intervention.

In the first millennium, Rome never interfered with the ecclesiastical affairs of the Eastern Church unless called upon to exercise her role of arbitration. However, during this time, such a role was not a unique privilege of Rome, but was shared by all five Patriarchs (Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Rome).

The relationship of Rome to the nations and churches of the West was entirely different from her relationship to the East. Rome was the Mother Church and benefactress of the West. She civilized and organized the West. "Interference" was therefore natural, and it became more and more frequent. By the end of the eleventh century, with Pope Gregory VII, these interferences developed into a form of centralization.

After the reform of Cluny, the ecclesiastical affairs were controlled in such a strict manner that the Church of Rome assumed the form of an exclusively monarchical system of government in imitation of the absolute monarchies of the times. The Pope, being a monarch and now a king of an earthly kingdom, transposed the manner of government of his estates onto the government of the Church. The Council of Trent, in reaction to the Protestant Reformation, tightened this absolutism into formal centralization by the creation of the Roman Congregations (Curia) whose major goal was uniformity in every ecclesiastical field and the elimination of diversity, which was considered a source of heresy and division.

A Sign of Unity Lost

Unfortunately, for the Church of East, the greatest loss was the break in communion with the Bishop of Rome, who was considered to be the symbol and sign of unity for the whole Church. More attached to the mystical and spiritual reality of the Church as a fellowship, and more humanely spontaneous to its own organizational setup, the Eastern Church also lost much of the spirit of vigor and unity in her spiritual administration.

The different apostolic sees loosened their ties of unity among themselves and among the churches that were later established. New "autonomous" or "autocephalous" sees were created, not only for reasons of national necessity, but also out of a spirit of overt opposition, and with a feeling of power or superiority toward other churches. This fragmentation further re-

sulted in the loss of many elements of strength and in the sense of partnership.

An Anxious Longing

But throughout the upheavals of history, and in spite of the catastrophic human incidents be-

tween East and West, the Holy Spirit kept alive an anxious longing for unity and for the restoration of peace in the Church.

Excerpted and adapted from "The Face of God: Essays in Byzantine Spirituality," Archbishop Joseph M. Raya, God With Us Publications, McKees Rocks, Pa.



Removed from Memory... Committed to Oblivion!

Following is the text of the joint Catholic-Orthodox declaration, approved by Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople, read simultaneously (December 7, 1965) at a public meeting of the ecumenical council in Rome and at a special ceremony in Istanbul. The declaration concerns the Catholic-Orthodox exchange of excommunications in 1054.

1. Grateful to God, who mercifully favored them with a fraternal meeting at those holy places where the mystery of salvation was accomplished through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and where the Church was born through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I have not lost sight of the determination each then felt to omit nothing thereafter which charity might inspire and which could facilitate the development of the fraternal relations thus taken up between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Constantinople. They are persuaded that in acting this way, they are responding to the call of that divine grace which today is leading the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, as well as all Christians, to over-

come their differences in order to be again "one" as the Lord Jesus asked of His Father for them.

2. Among the obstacles along the road of the development of these fraternal relations of confidence and esteem, there is the memory of the decisions, actions and painful incidents which in 1054 resulted in the sentence of excommunication leveled against the Patriarch Michael Cerularius and two other persons by the legate of the Roman See under the leadership of Cardinal Humbertus, legates who then became the object of a similar sentence pronounced by the patriarch and the Synod of Constantinople.
3. One cannot pretend that these events were not what they were during this very troubled period of history. Today, however, they have been judged more fairly and serenely. Thus it is important to recognize the excesses which accompanied them and later led to consequences which, insofar as we can judge, went much further than their authors had intended and foreseen. They had directed their censures against the persons concerned and not the Churches. These censures were not intended to break ecclesiastical

communion between the Sees of Rome and Constantinople.

4. Since they are certain that they express the common desire for justice and the unanimous sentiment of charity which moves the faithful, and since they recall the command of the Lord: *"If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brethren has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go first be reconciled to your brother"* (Matthew 5.23-24), Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I with his synod, in common agreement, declare that:

A. They regret the offensive words, the reproaches without foundation, and the reprehensible gestures which, on both sides, have marked or accompanied the sad events of this period.

B. They likewise regret and remove both from memory and from the midst of the Church the sentences of excommunication which followed these events, the memory of which has influenced actions up to our day and has hindered closer relations in charity; and they commit these excommunications to oblivion.

C. Finally, they deplore the preceding and later vexing events which, under the influence of various factors—among which, lack of understanding and mutual trust—eventually led to the effective rupture of ecclesiastical communion.

5. Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I with his synod realize that this gesture of justice and mutual pardon is not sufficient to end both old and more recent differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

Through the action of the Holy Spirit those differences will be overcome through cleansing of

hearts, through regret for historical wrongs, and through an efficacious determination to arrive at a common understanding and expression of the faith of the Apostles and its demands.

They hope, nevertheless, that this act will be pleasing to God, who is prompt to pardon us when we pardon each other. They hope that the whole Christian world, especially the entire Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church will appreciate this gesture as an expression of a sincere desire shared in common for reconciliation, and as an invitation to follow out in a spirit of trust, esteem and mutual charity the dialogue which, with God's help, will lead to living together again, for the greater good of souls and the coming of the kingdom of God, in that full communion of faith, fraternal accord and sacramental life which existed among them during the first thousand years of the life of the Church.



...the Church must breathe with her two lungs.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II

“Ut Unum Sint”

(“That They May Be One”)

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