

EASTERN ORTHODOXY AND THE ANGLICANS

By The Rev. Fr. Frederick Watson

The Orthodox Church and Anglican Orders

Julian Joseph Overbeck (1820-1905) was a Roman Catholic priest who converted to Eastern Orthodoxy and became a pioneer of Western Rite Orthodoxy (more on Western Rite Orthodoxy in a later article). In 1866, Overbeck wrote:

Christ charged his Apostles to teach and to administer the Sacraments. The Apostles consecrated Bishops to do the same. The Bishops ordained Priests and Deacons to assist them in this their work. No others were ever considered by the Church as competent to fulfill this task. Sacerdotal (priestly, ed.) power is from God, not from man. If anyone holds all the doctrines of the Church, but depends on an unlawful and invalid Episcopate, his belief cannot supply nor make good the invalidity of Ordination. There will be no Consecration of the Eucharist, no Absolution, etc, since the pretended priest is nothing but a layman.



Preliminary Considerations

In the early years of the twentieth century, there were several cases of Eastern Orthodox laymen seeking the Sacraments at the hands of Anglican priests in America. This was due primarily to the lack of Orthodox Bishops and, therefore, the lack of a validly celebrated Divine Liturgy among the Orthodox. While Orthodoxy was in the process of seeking a Bishop thus validating and serving Divine Liturgies, the

aforementioned Orthodox laymen formally asked the Patriarchate of Constantinople whether the Ecumenical Patriarchate would approve their request to receive Holy Communion from the Anglicans.

At the same time, other priests of the American Episcopal Church asked what in effect was the same question in a narrower form. That question is central to this study. The question was this: in the event of intercommunion being established (between Anglicans in America and the Orthodox), would the Patriarchate of Constantinople be prepared to accept Anglican Orders (Bishop, Priest and Deacon) as valid? In other words, would Orthodoxy accept the sacraments administered by Anglican (Episcopal) priests as valid? Also, could Anglican priests be received into Orthodoxy without a re-ordination in Orthodoxy?



Theological College of Halki

The issue was forwarded to the professors of the Theological College of Halki. The Halki seminary, formally the Theological School of Halki, was founded in 1844 on the island of Halki, the second-largest of the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara near Constantinople in Turkey. It was the main school of theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church's Ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople until the **Turkish** parliament enacted a law banning private higher education institutions in 1971. The faculty of the theological school at Halki turned their attention to the question of the validity of Anglican Orders. After all, without the acceptance of valid Anglican orders, negative answers to the former questions were inevitable.

A First Response

In 1903 Professor Chrestos Androutsos of Halki wrote the monograph, "*The Validity of English Ordinations from an Orthodox-Catholic point of view.*" This work was first published as an article in the official organ of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and gained great favor in the Greek Orthodox Churches.

Prof. Androutsos stated two initial considerations. First, he believed that what he called "external union" (that is, the outward reception of Holy Communion, for example) can never produce the inward unity expected, apart from dogmatic (doctrinal) union. Second, he believed that inquiring into the validity of Anglican Orders was contrary to the fundamental principles of Orthodoxy according to which bodies which separate themselves from the Church by their own decision cannot preserve unity and communion with the true Church. Thus, from an Orthodox point of view, such enquiries would be both irregular and worthless.

Not, therefore, presuming to make his response to the wider questions, Prof. Androutsos directed his investigation to the question as to whether, assuming the individual Anglican priest to be in dogmatic union with the Eastern-Orthodox Churches, i.e. to share their faith, he might be received (not re-ordained) as a priest in his Orders.

Androutsos claimed that the "visible part" of Orthodox ordinations, i.e. the succession of Orthodox Bishops and the formulas of consecration, was valid as regards Anglican understanding of orders and ordination. In regard, however, to the "invisible part," (that is, the purpose to make a priest in the Orthodox sense) he found serious problems. Is the office of the priesthood in Orthodoxy of the same nature as the office of priesthood in Anglicanism? Some of the problems were partly found in the writings of some Anglican theologians but chiefly to his finding lack of clarity on this issue in the Prayer Book and especially in the Thirty-nine Articles. There he found what amounts to a denial of the Orthodox doctrine of the Priesthood (e.g.: XXIII. *Of Ministering in the Congregation. It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the Sacraments in the Congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard.*) Orthodoxy teaches that ordination is a Holy Mystery (a sacrament in Western terms), and affects the character of the ordained man. Orthodox

ordination is seen as much more than the practical application of law and order as found in Article XXIII.

In general, however, the result of his investigation was favorable on several points. However, Androutsos called for clarity in the position of the Anglicans or, more correctly, the individual Anglican priest who seeks to serve the Church as an Orthodox priest. Points include that the Anglican priest clearly demonstrate that he accepts:

- 1) that grace is transmitted in priesthood;
- 2) that the priest does not hold the Calvinistic doctrine of the Eucharist (i.e., that the body and blood of Christ is only symbolically, not really, present);
- 3) that the priest, having studied in humility and Christian love the Anglican Ordinal (ordination service) sees that it is truly in the line of Orthodoxy.

Finally, in order to put an end to these difficulties and to remove all such doubts from the Orthodox, Prof. Androutsos concludes that the Church of England must lay down, in a General Council of her Bishops, the doctrine of the ancient Church as a sure foundation and as an unquestioned principle. In addition, the Church of England (like Orthodoxy) must consider the Thirty-nine Articles as resolutions of a Local Council, holding them good only so far as they agree with the ancient doctrines.

In the Interim

The question, then, of the validity of Anglican orders in Orthodox eyes has come down to how the Anglicans would answer some pointed questions (as offered by Prof. Androutsos):

1. As regards the Sacraments. Does the Anglican Church receive the Seven Sacraments?

2. As regards Confession. Does the Anglican Church take Confession as a necessary condition for the remission of sins and the priestly absolving of sins as included in the authority given to it by the Lord ?

3. As regards the Eucharist. How does the Anglican Church accept the Real Presence of the Lord? And what is the character of the Unbloody Sacrifice ?
(*note: Orthodoxy does not accept the later Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation as developed by Thomas Aquinas. This teaching is a philosophical explanation of the manner in which the substance of bread and wine is changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, while the appearance of bread and wine remains the same.*



Byzantine Chalice,
Walters Museum

The Unbloody Sacrifice refers to the re-enactment of the one-time sacrifice of Christ on the Cross which re-enactment happens at every Divine Liturgy - *ed.*)

4. As regards the Ecumenical Councils. Will the Anglican Church receive these Councils as infallible organs of the true Church, the declarations of which bind every particular Church and accept them always as the true faith ?

The questions were not difficult to answer for the High Churchmen in the Anglican Church. The positive answers of the Low Churchmen and Middle Churchmen were not so easy to obtain.

Written as they were after a long and patient investigation to which he had been commissioned by the highest authority in the Eastern-Orthodox Churches and published by that authority with every mark of approval, the result of this investigation is plainly in the nature of an invitation. It is obvious that Prof. Androustos thoroughly understood the conditions of things in the Church of England and knew that, to say the least, time must elapse before it could be expected that a General Council of Anglican Bishops would make the declarations without which Dogmatic Union, that is to say Reunion, are impossible from an Eastern- Orthodox point of view.

It was, therefore, clearly something of an open letter to the Anglican Church and invited her to reply to those four explicit questions with a plain and unambiguous answer which might satisfy the Eastern-Orthodox authorities that Anglicans held the same doctrine of the Ministry as themselves and might justify them in accepting our Orders as valid in regard to their purpose and rite.

Up to the present no attempt has been made, or, as far as I am aware, has even been considered, to respond to that invitation.

The State of the Issue Today

From an Orthodox perspective, the question of the validity of Anglican orders today is a non-issue. While Anglican/Orthodox talks continue, these talks are primarily on the level of basic theological issues, and are somewhat out of touch with the realities of Anglicanism or Orthodoxy today.

One great issue is “Who talks for either Orthodoxy or Anglicanism?” From the Anglican side, is the Archbishop of Canterbury the final authority? Have the issues around sexuality (including the ordination of women and the ordination of professing homosexuals) trumped any possibility of getting to issues of order or ordination? From the Orthodox side, there is the continuing problem of *phyletism* as a major stumbling block in answering the above question, “Who speaks?”



Patriarch Kyrill of
Jerusalem in 1872

The term *phyletism* was coined at the all-Orthodox Synod that met in Istanbul (then Constantinople) in 1872. The meeting was prompted by the creation of a separate bishopric by the Bulgarian community of Istanbul for parishes *only open to Bulgarians*. It was the first time in Church history that a separate diocese was established based on ethnic identity rather than principles of Orthodoxy and territory. In condemning phyletism, the Synod in Constantinople had, in fact, defined a basic problem of modern Orthodoxy.

In the United States, most Eastern Orthodox parishes are ethnocentric, that is, focused on serving an ethnic community that has immigrated from overseas (e.g. the Greeks, Russians, Romanians, Serbians, Arabs, Carpatho-Rusyn, etc.) Many Orthodox Christians must travel long distances to find a local Church that is familiar to their ethnic background. Many Orthodox churches make some attempt to accommodate those of other ethnic traditions with varying degrees of success. This ethnic self-understanding of individual Orthodox parishes within ethnic Orthodox jurisdictions have created numerous problems within Orthodoxy in general:

1. Some Orthodox jurisdictions receive persons from Latin and certain Protestant bodies into Holy Orthodoxy by baptism and chrismation, some by chrismation alone, and some merely by confession of faith.
2. Some Orthodox jurisdictions receive Latin clergy converting to Holy Orthodoxy merely by vesting, while others ordain.
3. Some Orthodox jurisdictions recognize all marriages performed outside Holy Orthodoxy as being real marriages (though certainly not sacramental) whether performed for an Orthodox or non-Orthodox, while others recognize no marriages performed outside Holy Orthodoxy whether performed for an Orthodox or a non-Orthodox.
4. Some Orthodox jurisdictions bury suicides under certain circumstances, while others forbid the burial of suicides under all circumstances.
5. Some Orthodox jurisdictions bury a person who was cremated with all funeral rites in the church temple, others permit only Trisagion Prayers in the funeral home, some forbid any prayers anywhere for a person who was cremated. (*See "Phyletism" entry online in Wikipedia*)

In the end, the question of Anglican orders remains an open one, with Orthodoxy's door closed due primarily to Orthodoxy's inability to get its own house in order. Perhaps the door of the continuing Anglicans remains open a crack.

A personal note: I was ordained priest in the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A. in 1995. With the canonical introduction into the Episcopal church of several practices and beliefs that were contrary to my own understanding of historic and traditional Christianity, I chose to resign my Episcopal orders in 2002 and to seek ordination in Orthodoxy.

Immediately I was told (by the Russian Patriarchal Bishop-administrator) that I would have to be re-ordained with the blessing of the Patriarch of Moscow. Any ordination I had previously was invalid. After two years of seminary and parish training, I was still not approved (even for ordination to the sub-diaconate) primarily because I had not learned to speak Russian. The point of ordination apparently was to assure the hierarchy that I was a Russian before they would make me a priest.

I left the Russian jurisdiction for the American Carpatho-Rusyn diocese. This is a small (75 parishes in the U.S.A. and Canada) Orthodox Diocese who, though it holds its own Carpatho-Rusyn ethnic traditions high, are committed to being an American English-speaking Orthodoxy in an English-speaking country. I was ordained to the priesthood in Orthodoxy in 2007, and from which I retired in 2014.

My experience with Orthodoxy even in my own jurisdiction has revealed a continuing phyletism. A recent article in our own diocesan newspaper praised the work of our small seminary as the one place where the traditions of the Carpatho-Rusyn Diocese are held in great reverence, and, thus, should be kept open and operating with all our might and support (there will be two students in the Fall of 2015).

My hope and prayer is that the Holy Spirit will lead all corners of the Christian Church to put away the self-importance of individuals (priests, bishops and lay people), parishes, dioceses, and jurisdictions. Instead, by that same Spiritual power, let all give way to a humility that follows Christ first and foremost and that, following the Tradition of the Church united, the sin of division that is in all of us may be finally forgiven and forgotten.

References:

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