

A REVIEW OF DISSIDENT SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY

Five years ago it was my privilege to address this Society, making a cursory review of the main points on which Catholics and Orthodox disagree in the realm of dogmatic theology. These points are neither too numerous nor too difficult to preclude a harmonious solution. The most fundamental issue is the primacy of the pope. But even here, since the Orthodox already believe in the infallibility of the Church and in an honorary primacy of the Bishop of Rome in that Church, it might not be too sanguine to posit the possibility of arriving at an understanding of the pope as the mouthpiece of the infallible Church.

This year the officers of the Society have requested a review of Orthodox sacramental practice in the hope that this might furnish some summary of Orthodox moral theology by providing a glimpse of the actual religious life in an Orthodox parish, as well as bringing our Catholic theologians up to date on the practical questions they must face regarding intercommunion if any reunion should ever be achieved.

At the outset we should express the caution that in this practical as well as in the theoretical sphere, we must beware of absolute predications—because there is apt to be a divergency of practice between the various national groups of Orthodox and even within the same national group. The chief bodies of Orthodox—at least as far as theological leadership is concerned—are the Greeks and the Russians. Usually the Syrian and Albanian Orthodox will follow Greek practice, while the various Slav groups like the Serbs, Bulgars and Ukrainians will be content to follow the hegemony of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In this connection it is interesting to note that it was the discovery of a wide divergency between Greek and Russian practice in rebaptizing converts to the Orthodox Church that disenchanting the 19th century Anglican, William Palmer, with the Orthodox East and eventually brought him into the Catholic Church.

ORTHODOX PRACTICE

1. *Baptism*

a. From the time the definitive schism began in the eleventh century until the Orthodox Synod in Constantinople in 1484, the Greek Orthodox usually received converts from the Catholic Church by requiring simply a solemn profession of the Orthodox faith.

But the Synod of 1484, held under the leadership of Patriarch Simeon Trapezuntios, now required that besides the abjuration of heresy and profession of faith, the Catholic was to be reconfirmed.

In 1755, Patriarch Cyril V, with the agreement of the Orthodox patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem, issued a decree ordering all Latin and Armenian converts to Orthodoxy to be rebaptized and then confirmed. This baptism was ordinarily to be conferred by triple immersion. If the prospective converts demurred loudly enough, they were sometimes received without iteration of sacraments—by “economy.”

“Economy”—*οἰκονομία*—is a particular theological specialty of the Orthodox Church. It means that the Church—to which Christ gave full power—applies to a soul the sacramental grace without performing the sacramental rite of uniting matter and form in the outward sign.

From the time of the Photian difficulties in the ninth century until the Constantinopolitan Synod of 1484 made it definite, there was a growing conviction in the East that the Latins were heretics. The chief reason was that first adduced by Photius: “Latins are heretics because of their doctrine regarding the Procession of the Holy Ghost.”

Even though Cyril V’s decree was assented to by the patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem, most of the Orthodox bishops protested strongly against rebaptism of Latins and Armenians.

The Greeks looked upon Lutherans and Calvinists as species of Latins and treated them accordingly—requiring only the profession of faith and confirmation until the decree of 1755, when they too became subject to rebaptism.

In Russia the situation was different. There was really no general consciousness of being separated from the West until the Synod

of Moscow in 1441 which repudiated the Council of Florence. From then until another Moscow Synod in 1667, Catholics of any rite were rebaptized if they wished to join the Russian Orthodox Church.

In 1667 the Russian bishops decreed that Latins were not to be rebaptized; simply the profession of faith was needed and then confirmation. In the following century, however, while Cyril V was decreeing rebaptism among the Greeks, the Russian Church, led by the theologians of the school of Kiev, received Latins with the mere profession of faith. The same held for baptized Protestants, except that they received confirmation because Lutherans and Calvinists had no real sacrament of confirmation.

Although St. Basil the Great (Hom. on Baptism 5, P.G. 31, 433) and St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Catech. 17, P.G. 33, 365) teach the indelible character of baptism, there has been great variety of opinion on this matter by Orthodox theologians through the centuries.

Modern Orthodox theologians feel no great embarrassment about the varying positions of their church authorities. The great 20th century Greek theologian, Androutsos, says that all sacraments of heretics are invalid. But if church authorities wish sometimes to apply *economy*, they may do so; at other times they may decide not to apply it. One reason why they decided against using *economy* in the eighteenth century, was the alarm they felt in the East at the proselytizing activities of Catholic missionaries, especially among the Syrians. By decreeing rebaptism of Latins, the Orthodox authorities wished to emphasize the radical difference between the two churches!

It was my good fortune, in preparing this paper, to be able to engage in personal discussions with Orthodox priests. One, whom I shall hereafter refer to as Father P., received his doctorate at the University of Athens, so he tells me, for "religious studies." I asked him what he thought about rebaptism and he said: "If anyone is baptized by a believing man with the Trinitarian formula, then he is validly baptized, whether Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant. To repeat baptism in such a case is a 'mockery of a sacred thing'."

Evidently he does not share Androutsos' opinion about heretics'

baptism being invalid; for the Orthodox certainly realize that Protestants are heretics.

Once I was speaking with a Syrian Orthodox priest. A remark he made gave me the suspicion that he did not acknowledge Catholic sacraments. So I asked him: "Father, don't you believe that Catholics have valid sacraments? After all, the Catholics believe that you Orthodox have valid sacraments." He replied: "I hope you have valid sacraments!" "What do you mean, you 'hope' we do?" I asked. He said: "You have valid orders *if* you are not heretics!"

Sometimes Orthodox clergy repeat the baptism of Catholics because they know that the Catholic clergy repeat the baptism of Orthodox entering the Catholic Church. Of course we know that such Catholic priests are giving the baptism conditionally; but the Orthodox clergy do not know this and resent it bitterly. One of my classmates at the Pontifical Institute in Rome, a Friar Minor who had spent some years working in Egypt, assured me that hundreds of Coptic Christians refused to become Catholics because the Catholic authorities there ordered conditional baptism.

One cannot help sympathizing with Orthodox feelings in this regard, for: first, the Holy See has repeatedly acknowledged the validity of Orthodox sacraments; and secondly, Catholic theologians acknowledge the validity of emergency baptisms administered even by atheists if they have at least the intention, as the Council of Trent says, "of doing what the Church does." Hence the reason for conditional rebaptism sometimes adduced by Catholic chanceries that "maybe the Orthodox ministrant did not have the right intention" sounds a bit hollow in Orthodox ears. The Orthodox do not accept the baptism administered by an unbeliever; the minister must be at least a believing Christian himself, even though, as in the case of Protestants, the minister is heretical. This represents the common opinion today.

In this connection it is interesting to note that Father George Florovsky, an eminent Orthodox theologian now teaching Byzantine history at Harvard, reminds his Orthodox coreligionists that the Roman Church is much fairer to the Orthodox—acknowledging the validity of their orders and sacraments—than many Orthodox are willing to be toward Rome, by passing hasty judgments on every-

thing Roman as invalid, including baptism. ("Le Messenger," no. 52, 1959—the publication of the Russian Christian Students Movement.)

b. Regarding the time lapse between birth and baptism, no definite period is assigned. This is in line with general Orthodox thinking—of avoiding definition and precision. The determining factor seems to be the health of the child. In Europe baptism often followed within a few days of birth because of a high rate of infant mortality. In America this is not the case. Father P. tells me that anything from a few weeks to a few months is allowed in practice.

c. The old controversy between Greeks and Latins about baptism by immersion is no longer a living issue, since the Orthodox baptize sick infants and adults simply by aspersion or infusion on the head. Theory still calls for triple immersion for everyone; practice has modified this as just outlined.

d. Sponsors are supposed to be two practicing Orthodox. Since confirmation follows baptism immediately—forming with it one sacred rite of initiation—no special sponsors are employed for this second sacrament.

2. Confirmation

a. In the Byzantine rite, confirmation or chrismation, as it is called, is administered by the priest immediately after baptism. This is the usage both of the United or Catholic Byzantines as well as of the Orthodox. Although a priest can administer it, the chrism used must be blessed by a bishop. Among the Greeks the chrism must be procured from Constantinople, where it is blessed by the patriarch. According to present usage, it must be renewed every four years. No determined time is given between the consecration on Holy Thursday and the arrival of the chrism at all the outlying parishes. The old chrism is good until the new arrives. In Russia the chrism is consecrated by the Patriarch of Moscow. Outside Russia each church receives the chrism from its metropolitan, that is, the primate or chief bishop in a country.

b. Catholics of Byzantine rite in America follow our own custom of receiving the chrism from their own diocesan bishops. It is consecrated each year on Holy Thursday.

c. We saw under the rebaptism question that confirmation is repeated on Catholics entering Orthodoxy as well as upon lapsed Orthodox who return. This is done because the Orthodox in general do not believe that chrismation implants an inedible mark; hence they feel that the convert must be confirmed in the true faith attained or recovered.

3. *Holy Eucharist*

a. The chief variance between Catholic and Orthodox eucharistic practice consists in the communication of infants. In theory, the child may receive Holy Communion with its parents until it reaches the age of reason, when confession and instruction must first take place. In practice, customs differ. Some Greeks communicate the child with a few drops of the Precious Blood for several Sundays after its baptism. Some Russians hold that the child can communicate as long as it can be carried to church in the parents' arms.

Among Byzantine Catholics, the custom of communicating infants has lapsed into desuetude except among the small body of United Russians.

b. Regarding frequency of communion—there is a wide range of practice in each church's members just as there is with us. But rarely outside monasteries do the Orthodox know daily communion. In general it would most accurately describe the situation to say that universal Orthodox practice today parallels that of the Catholic Church before Pope St. Pius X. A fervent Orthodox receives four times a year—at Christmas, Easter, SS. Peter and Paul and the Assumption. But many Orthodox in good standing communicate only at Easter time. Father P. says that he is trying to get his better people to receive once a month.

It may be noted here that outside of monasteries daily celebration of the liturgy is not practiced. Only feast days, or Mass for some public intention or occasion merit the celebration of the eucharistic liturgy during the week. Celebration by a priest for his own devotion is almost unknown—the reason being, they say, that the liturgy, by its very name, presupposes public worship and the presence of a congregation.

Another point of Orthodox theory: there can be only one Mass

per day at an altar. They say: "The altar must be fasting like the priest." Catholic Byzantines have abandoned that ruling because of the exigencies of modern parish life, though the United Russians change the antimimension each time if there is to be more than one Mass at the same altar the same day. The theory: changing the antimimension constitutes a new altar.

But recently I saw a new sign at the Greek Orthodox church in Hempstead, L. I., where the weeping Madonnas are enshrined, advertising two liturgies there every Sunday morning! Evidently the miracle has increased church attendance, and Orthodox theory has had to give way to practical need.

c. Another liturgical point: Orthodox priests do not function as deacons on solemn occasions. If no deacon is available, solemnity is achieved by concelebration of the clergy. Among Catholic Byzantines, the United Russians continue to observe this rule. Other Catholic Byzantines admit concelebration at any time, but do not demur at functioning as deacons.

Concelebration is fostered also by the ruling about one Mass at an altar per day. If a church has only one altar—as Orthodox churches usually do—then a plurality of priests wishing to celebrate is best accommodated this way.

d. Orthodox observe the old fasting law for Holy Communion, such as we knew before Pope Pius XII. The eastern Catholics, of course, follow the new ruling about the three hour fast. Some Orthodox fast and abstain for a whole day before communion.

e. The Blessed Sacrament is usually reserved under the species of bread only and put into unconsecrated wine to be administered to the sick or in the Liturgy of the Presanctified during Lent. Some Russians touch each host (they do not reserve many) with a drop of the Precious Blood from the communion spoon.

4. *Penance*

a. There is little discrepancy between Catholic and Orthodox theory regarding the sacrament of Penance. It was only after the first Protestant influences were felt in the East,—under Patriarch Cyril Lukaris among the Greeks in the 17th century and under Theophanes Prokopovich in Russia in the 19th century—that a new

attitude was taken toward the penance imposed on the penitent. Called *epitimion* (lit. a restriction), it was considered to be merely medicinal for the soul and in no way satisfactory for the punishment due to sin. This attitude results from Protestant emphasis on the completeness of Christ's satisfaction for the sins of men.

b. In practice there are some discrepancies between Catholics and Orthodox. In general, the Orthodox do not follow the prescription made by the Council of Trent, that the penitent tell the precise nature of his sins and the number of times for serious ones. Orthodox authors caution their faithful to confess their sins "sincerely, without reserve, as if making their confession to God, etc." but leave it in these general terms.

Of course the priest may ask questions and thorough lists of questions are published for the priest's use. Which questions he asks or which he omits are left to his own judgment.

With an Orthodox penitent, as with a Catholic one, the integrity of the penitent's accusation will depend upon his training and the frequency with which he receives the sacrament. Frequency of reception usually parallels that of Holy Communion: a fervent Orthodox confesses and communicates four times a year; an Orthodox in good standing contents himself with making his Easter duty.

Some Orthodox penitents confine themselves to simply answering the priests' questions and make no accusation themselves. An abuse once prevalent in Russia so eased the penitents' burden that instead of answering even so precisely as "yes" or "no" to the priest's questions, he simply murmured feelingly to every question: "I am a sinner." With this mild system it was easy for whole groups to make confession at once; all gave the same answer to the same questions!

c. Czar Peter the Great introduced arbitrarily into church law in Russia the ruling that if a priest heard anything in confession treasonable to the state or destructive of the common good, he was not bound by the seal of confession. Be it said to the credit of the Orthodox clergy, the seal was not often broken; but one hears of cases today where some priests, probably among those who have had almost no real training for their work, have violated the seal frivolously and have understandably lost the confidence of their people. This accounts also for the fact that some simple and pious Orthodox

people make their confessions and receive Holy Communion in Catholic churches without any misgivings at all. One such Orthodox woman, when chided about her going occasionally to the Catholic church for Mass and Communion during the week, replied: "Do you mean to tell me it's not the same Lord in Communion in both churches?"

Not too long ago the present writer was called to the parlor to see a young lady who told me that she had heard I was very sympathetic toward people of the eastern rite. Then she said she was Greek Orthodox and wanted to know if I would hear her Easter confession. I asked why she did not go to her own church. She replied she did not trust Orthodox priests because of rumors about their not keeping the penitent's confidence. (She was not acquainted with the term "seal of the confessional".) I told her she would have to become a Catholic for me to hear her confession. She said she would like to but could not because it would break her parents' hearts and they would regard her as a complete traitor to them and to her Greek inheritance. . . .

Are such cases frequent? I have no way of knowing; I doubt it; but certainly such evils are due to lack of proper education of the clergy.

d. Once an Orthodox priest is ordained, he has jurisdiction also to hear the confessions of all Orthodox anywhere in the world—as long as he is not suspended by his own bishop. The Orthodox therefore ignore our distinction between power of orders and power of jurisdiction in this matter.

5. Extreme Unction

a. In the Byzantine rite, the oil used in anointing the sick is blessed by the priest. This is true for the Catholics as well as for the Orthodox.

b. The ritual calls for the administration of this sacrament by seven priests, but this is hardly possible outside the larger monasteries. All admit it can be given in case of need by one priest.

c. Among the Russians the sacrament of unction is given to the seriously sick or dying, but among the Greeks it is not looked upon as the particular sacrament of the moribund. The most com-

mon practice among them today is to administer this sacrament on Wednesday evening in Holy Week—to all the people in the church who come forward to receive it. In some churches this unction is made available on the vigils of the four great feasts—as a kind of sequence to the sacrament of penance. In general the Russians and Podcarpathians continue to administer unction only to the very sick. But in some Russian churches an imitation of the Greek practice has already crept in.

There was no controversy at all between eastern and western theologians about Extreme Unction before the 15th century—when Simeon of Thessalonica impugned the Latins for ignoring the full sense of the text of St. James' famous words: "And the prayer of faith will save (i.e. heal) the sick man." Simeon thought the Latins gave this sacrament only to someone already dying, instead of those for whose recovery one could readily hope and pray.

The question of just how sick the recipient of unction must be has had a varying history through the centuries in the West as well as in the East. Father Paul Palmer, S.J., has written an interesting study of the whole question that appeared in *Theological Studies*, 19, 1958, 309-344. Possibly some abuse has existed in the western Church through narrowing the reception of unction too much; and in the East surely the conferral of unction on people who are physically healthy "lest they get sick" is a grotesque distortion of the text of promulgation in St. James' Epistle.

6. *Holy Orders*

a. For many centuries there was no important discrepancy between the East and West regarding holy orders. There was some bickering about the number of orders, since the Byzantine rite has only two minor orders, the lectorate and the subdiaconate, while the Roman rite distinguishes four of them and rates the subdiaconate as a major order. However, all agree that the three top orders—of bishop, priest and deacon—are of divine origin.

b. East and West also agreed for many centuries that holy orders, like baptism, could not be repeated, although the eastern theologians rarely use the expression "indelible character." But in 1860, Philaret Drozdov, Metropolitan of Moscow and author of the

famous Russian catechism, declared that holy orders could be lost by a priest's falling into heresy or apostasy. He shows his Protestant taint by ignoring tradition and saying that Sacred Scripture makes no mention of an indelible character and that such a character is merely the brain child of the Latin scholastics. Father Jugie thinks that Philaret was probably orientated toward this conclusion because the lay procurator of the Holy Synod, Tolstoi, asked him about it. Tolstoi was hoping for the answer Philaret gave him so that he might have more authority for some rules he was excogitating then for the reduction of clerics to the lay state.

Yet other Russian theologians like Malevanski and Ekzemplarski maintain the Catholic doctrine, as does Maltzew. At the synod of Moscow held in 1918, some Russian theologians loudly defended holy orders' indelible character and they were not opposed by anyone present.

c. Regarding reordination of converts, the practice has oscillated just as for baptism. Whenever converts to Orthodoxy were being rebaptized, then of course convert clerics were reordained. When the simple profession of faith sufficed, then Latin clerics were not reordained. It is interesting to note that in 1846 a Melkite (i.e., a united Byzantine in the Levant) bishop was received into the Orthodox church as a simple layman and then was given all the orders in succession. On the other hand, in 1860, when several Melkite bishops and priests turned Orthodox, they were received—according to a decree of the Patriarch of Constantinople—by simple profession of faith and chrismation!

Regarding Anglican orders there is a great deal of confusion among Orthodox writers. The Russians, like Macarius, Maltzew, and Malinovski reject them, while the Greeks, Bernardakis and Patriarch Meletios Metakis accept them. Andrutso and Dyovuniotis reserve judgment saying that the question must await a clarification of what the Anglicans believe about holy orders.

d. In the eastern churches, ordination of married men to the priesthood has always been practiced, while from the sixth century on, only celibates—hence, usually monks—were consecrated bishops. The Emperor Justinian made this a matter of law throughout the eastern empire. These regulations persisted until modern times. I

know of no change in the official position of the Orthodox church, but I have heard that sometimes a priest, whose wife died, married again. This was unheard of until recent times and a candidate for the priesthood had to marry before becoming a deacon or remain forever celibate. Widowers, of course, can be and often have been, consecrated bishops. But if a married priest has ever been made a bishop—as I heard on occasion happened—I presume it happened only recently and in some splinter dissident group rather than in the official Orthodox church.

7. *Matrimony*

a. The gradual introduction of divorce into the eastern Church began with the Emperor Justinian who sanctioned it in his code of laws. The reason why it did not become a matter of controversy between East and West until a thousand years later is because the West—for the most part—devoted its energies to answering the attacks and incriminations of the Greeks and did not go exploring to find other topics for polemics against the Greeks.

At the reunion Council of Lyons in 1274, the Emperor Michael Paleologus signed the declaration that when a legitimate marriage was dissolved by the death of one of the spouses, second and third marriages could be contracted.

At Florence the indissolubility of marriage was not discussed and came up only after the decree of reunion had been signed. Pope Eugene summoned the Greek bishops to himself and addressed them in very friendly terms and said that of course there must be unanimity also on a matter so sacred as the indissolubility of a sacramental marriage. What had they to say? They took counsel together and then told the pope that they could not speak for their whole church without the emperor's consent. They would ask him. But the emperor kept delaying his response; he had no intention of allowing discussion on a topic that he suspected could ruin the hard-won reunion. Political urgency in Constantinople propelled the Greeks homeward without the matter being further discussed.

The Council of Trent said nothing in direct condemnation of Greek practice in this matter, but defined that if anyone says the Church has erred in teaching that marriage cannot be dissolved ex-

cept by death and that this is in accord with gospel teaching and apostolic tradition, let him be anathema.

b. Greek canonists say that equal to physical death—which dissolves marriage—is moral or legal death. Adultery or deep hatred would constitute moral death. Exile, incurable disease, disappearance for three years constitute legal death. Any cause judged serious enough by the patriarch is also admitted as reason for divorce.

In practice today a couple desiring divorce must obtain one first from the state. Then they present their case to the bishop, pay their taxa, and are declared ecclesiastically divorced. Both parties may marry again in church, but with an abbreviated ceremony that differs from the usual solemnity of Byzantine nuptials. This practice of divorce, without any doubt, constitutes the gravest practical hindrance to reunion.

I asked Father P. what he thought about this matter, for since Catholics hold that marriage's indissolubility is a divinely given law, they cannot yield anything on this matter. He said he thought that in the event of reunion, the East and the West should each go its own way in such matters of "discipline." Evidently he did not understand the import of my question and there was no time to prosecute the conversation.

However, in this matter he is following the opinion of a prominent modern Orthodox theologian, Professor Alivisatos of the Theological Faculty of the University of Athens, who declared that he thought there should be a species of reunion between the western and eastern churches similar to the "coexistence" that obtained before the separation, despite divergencies and perpetual difficulties (*To Vima*, Feb. 1, 1959).

c. Orthodox laws make no provision for the extraordinary form of marriage—exchange of vows by baptized Christians before official witnesses when the priest is unable to be present (Can. 1098). Orthodox authorities do not consider as valid the marital contracts made before secular officials or Protestant ministers. The priest's blessing is necessary to constitute a valid sacramental marriage.

Ordinarily the jurisdiction for a wedding belongs to the bride's pastor. But in America the Orthodox are so scattered that hardly any true parish "lines" exist and marriages can take place in almost

any Orthodox church—as baptism can. But if the locale is other than the usual one of the bride, she should secure the written permission of her pastor.

If dispensations are needed, the bride's bishop is to give them. But permission for first cousins to marry is not given, says Father P.

The bans are announced in both the bride's and the bridegroom's usual parish. Baptismal certificates are sought, if possible. But Father P. says it is almost impossible to secure them from behind the Iron Curtain, and not at all from the Soviet Union. The say-so of two witnesses is accepted to establish the fact of baptism and the freedom to marry. There is no system like our Roman one of sending notifications of marriage to the place of baptism. The marriage is recorded merely in the marriage register of the church where it takes place.

Conclusion

Orthodox religious life is centered upon its majestic liturgy and the intense veneration of its icons. The saints and Our Lady are very real to Orthodox believers; they are always close at hand to help their brothers in the communion of saints.

Orthodox preoccupation with ritual observance has obscured consideration of the Church's need to come to grips with social and moral evils and problems. The liturgy was left to speak for itself, and hence there was little preaching or instruction of the people.

Even the clergy were often poorly trained; it seemed to suffice that a man could read and sing and perform the liturgy to be ordained; theological knowledge was of secondary importance. Hence, religious teachers were often laymen; indeed, even the professors of theology in the few seminaries of the East are often laymen.

The main body of the people is devout and ready to be taught and led. But among the younger Orthodox people who have grown up in America and received little or no religious instruction, there is great ignorance of even basic dogmatic truths, and adherence to their ancestors' faith continues only as a badge of ancestral national loyalty. The evil of divorce is spreading constantly; it represents the extent to which the people are becoming secularized.

Apart from this great stumbling-block of divorce, there is little

in the sacramental practice of the Orthodox that need cause any sharp pain to be harmonized with Catholic dogma. Extreme Unction needs to be restricted to the sick; but this and the universal restoration of integrity in confession are matters that could be readily solved by proper instruction of the clergy and the people.

Our Blessed Mother, whose name is never long absent from any prayer or service in the eastern churches, will surely smooth away all the rough spots on the road to reunion if both Catholics and Orthodox join in her Son's prayer "that all may be one."

CLEMENT C. ENGLERT, C.S.S.R.
*Church of the Immaculate Conception
 of B.V.M.
 Bronx, New York*

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* Asterisk indicates Orthodox authors.