

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN ENGLAND

ORTHODOX-ROMAN CATHOLIC STUDY DAY

23rd October 2008

The study day was organised by Churches Together in England to enable participants to learn about the Orthodox-Roman Catholic international dialogue, especially the recent developments, and Orthodoxy in general. The meeting was chaired by Bede Gerard, Ecumenical Officer for Oxfordshire, and the main speaker was H.G. Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia.

The event began and ended with brief Orthodox liturgies making special reference to the feast of St. James commemorated in the Orthodox calendar on this day. There were two main sessions. The format for each session was a talk by Metropolitan Kallistos, brief reflections in small groups followed by a plenary session of questions and answers.

Session I – Worldwide Governance in Orthodoxy and Orthodoxy in Britain & Ireland Today

a) Worldwide Governance in Orthodoxy

Orthodoxy can be considered as a family or communion of churches united in faith, worship and sacramental communion. Each church is independent in administration. There is no papacy, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople holds a primacy of honour and his status is more akin to the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Anglican Communion, although Metropolitan Kallistos observed that the Archbishop of Canterbury exercised more power than the Ecumenical Patriarch as was evident at the 2008 Lambeth Conference.

There are fourteen self-governing churches each led by a patriarch or metropolitan. They are mostly national, but some have territory in more than one location. The Orthodox Church is a conciliar church whereby authority at the highest level is exercised through ecumenical councils. The last one was in 787. Many local councils have taken place which have discussed doctrinal issues and there have been meetings of heads of the churches. Since 1961 pan-Orthodox Conferences have also been organised. Metropolitan Kallistos said there was a need to distinguish between faith, common to all Orthodoxy, and theological opinion, which can vary throughout the communion. The bishop stressed that dogmas should be formulated sparingly and not be multiplied without necessity which he felt was a tendency in the Catholic Church. As an example, the only definitions relating to the human person are the denial of the pre-existence of the soul and the affirmation of the resurrection of the body. There is no dogma relating to the Fall. The Blessed Virgin Mary as *Theotokos* is a dogma in Orthodoxy and although her assumption into heaven is believed it has not been defined as dogma as in Catholicism.

Differences in worship, the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, are external such as the mode of singing and language.

Although there is sacramental communion there has been a history of schisms such as that between the Bulgarian Orthodox and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople and the Moscow Patriarchate with the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia. This latter schism was healed in 2006.

Orthodoxy sets great store in the importance of the office of bishop. However, Metropolitan Kallistos quoted a former Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, who said that whilst bishops are essential they are not necessarily an advantage.

There are two types of synod operating in the Orthodox Church. One is a small, permanent synod as exemplified in Greece where 12 bishops meet every week. The other type is a synod of the hierarchy where all diocesan bishops meet annually. In some synods the clergy and laity play a part in the episcopal election to the synod.

b) Orthodoxy in Britain & Ireland

Orthodoxy is a recent presence here, a reference to an account of 1827 was given which described the size of a congregation meeting for the Orthodox liturgy consisting of 10 to 12 individuals. Currently there are 200 clergy and 217 places of worship. In 1979 there were about 10,000 Orthodox Christians in Britain and Ireland whereas in 2007 the number had increased to 28-30,000 almost solely as a result of immigration. One challenge is the loss of the young on a massive scale to regular involvement in the life of the church.

95% of parishes have been established since the Second World War. There is one major monastery in Essex with 12 monks and 30 nuns. Whilst there are centres for Orthodox studies in Cambridge and the Midlands, near Birmingham together with an Orthodox theology course at Lampeter, there is no institution of higher learning solely associated with the Orthodox Church.

There is jurisdictional fragmentation in this country, with a sub-division of ecclesial families. The largest are the Greeks with a sizeable presence of Russian and Romanian Orthodox Christians. The Russian presence is composed of three groups – one group as a direct extension of the Moscow Patriarchate, the second as the Russian Church outside Russia and the third group under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Ukrainian Orthodox come under the Patriarchate of Constantinople whilst Arabic-speaking Orthodox Christians are under the jurisdiction of the Antiochian Patriarchate.

There has been a steady flow of converts from those of British origin over the last 30 years and now total about 1,000 in number. Forty percent of Orthodox clergy are indigenous British. There is no proselytisation but the door is always open to new members. The Orthodox Church was the one link from the mother country for

immigrants, but as the decades pass this is more of an anomaly. The eucharist is a uniting feature and there should be one bishop per area. An inter-Orthodox Episcopal Committee is needed in this country, as happens in other countries with no historical presence of the Orthodox tradition, but so far such an initiative has not been seized upon by the hierarchy.

Session II – The ‘Ravenna Statement’*

The Council of Florence/Ferrara in 1438-9 was the last event where there was representation from both eastern and western churches. It spent ten months discussing the Holy Spirit and the *filioque* clause, four months on purgatory and ten days on papal primacy. If the time spent represented the relative importance of the subjects Metropolitan Kallistos suggested that today the time allotted to the same subjects would be in exactly reverse order to reflect the current importance of these subjects.

Contemporary Orthodox-Roman Catholic formal dialogue began in 1980 at Patmos. Whilst the Council of Florence started with points of divergence the methodology of the current dialogue starts with points of convergence. The first agreed statement was on the Trinity, eucharist and the relationship between the local and universal church. After the fall of communism and the revival of the uniate churches, particularly the one in the Ukraine, which are in full communion with Rome, the dialogue became bogged down in issues relating to the friction between the uniates and Orthodox. During the 1990's very little progress was made and for a time the dialogue was suspended, but is now back on track.

The Ravenna statement, formally titled *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority*, begins to address papal primacy. Currently, a committee, of which Metropolitan Kallistos is a member, is examining evidence from the first millennium where diversity in the exercise of authority was apparent which did not impair Eucharistic fellowship. The committee hopes to establish the limits to this diversity and will be meeting in 2009 to formulate a statement. When the committee turns to the second millennium, the Orthodox attitude to the First Vatican Council, when papal infallibility was defined, will be a major consideration.

There are three levels of authority in the Church which run through the Ravenna statement: a) primacy of the local bishop, b) regional primacy – through a chief bishop of a group of local churches, c) universal primacy of the pope. The pope exercises authority at all three levels. Metropolitan Kallistos quoted the historic writing of Allatius to establish this and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity has also confirmed this understanding. Orthodoxy has no problem with the first two levels of authority, but universal primacy is disputed. In the first millennium whilst bishops of the east appealed to the Bishop of Rome as final court of appeal, direct, ordinary jurisdiction by the Bishop of Rome is questioned.

Metropolitan Kallistos relayed the concerns of Orthodoxy of the abandonment by Pope Benedict XVI of the title 'Patriarch of the West' which has historically been assigned to the pope. This development is traced back to a publication in the 1990's by Rev Adriano Garuti, a member of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, (English Translation: *Primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the Ecumenical Dialogue*, 2004, Ignatius Press, San Francisco) which swallowed up this title into the universal primacy. In a critical review of this publication at the time Walter, now Cardinal, Kasper said that the ecclesiology employed to justify the elimination of the title was outmoded and pre-conciliar. Furthermore, as professor in the 1960's, Joseph Ratzinger had insisted on the distinction between universal pontiff and patriarch, that there was a need to build up patriarchal spaces and to see the pope as brother of other patriarchs. Ravenna insists on the pope retaining the title of patriarch although some in Orthodoxy insist on the pope as senior patriarch and nothing else – a view held by the former Ecumenical Patriarch, Demetrios.

The Ravenna document definitely states that the pope has a universal primacy and follows the thinking of a number of Orthodox theologians. Synodality cannot exist without primacy (*protos*) – the pope must preside at synods. There cannot be collegiality without primacy as the pope has a worldwide *diakonia*. The question is what kind of primacy is to be exercised. Ravenna makes use of apostolic canon 34 in article 24 of the agreed statement which expresses the relationship between the local Churches of a region: 'The bishops of each province (*ethnos*) must recognize the one who is first (*protos*) amongst them, and consider him to be their head (*kephale*), and not do anything important without his consent (*gnome*); each bishop may only do what concerns his own diocese (*paroikia*) and its dependent territories. But the first (*protos*) cannot do anything without the consent of all. For in this way concord (*homonoia*) will prevail, and God will be praised through the Lord in the Holy Spirit'.

Whilst this apostolic canon is discussing regional, as opposed to universal, primacy the principle of mutuality and reciprocity could be applied to universal primacy. Orthodoxy could accept a primacy in mutuality where the pope consults before pronouncing. A top-down exercise of authority is not acceptable to Orthodoxy. The appointment of bishops is a case in point. The pope unilaterally appointing bishops is a relatively recent phenomenon and some of the appointments made by Pope John-Paul II were impositions not wholly acceptable to the local church. Such recent examples of the exercise of authority by the papacy reflect a universal primacy inimical to that envisaged by Orthodoxy.

Metropolitan Kallistos felt that the Ravenna document offered hope for further development and progress. However, this hope is dependent on the reception of the agreed statement by both Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches.

*The core of this presentation can also be found in *Primate or Protos?*, Kallistos Ware, *The Tablet*, 25th July 2009.

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