

## THE RECONCILIATION OF EAST AND WEST

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**P**ÈRE DANIELOU has expressed in a recent book his opinion that the theology of the Holy Ghost, hitherto so little developed in the Church, will receive definitive form only when it has been formulated in the thought of India: that this indeed is the providential vocation of Indian thought, just as that of Greek thought has been to express the theology of the Incarnation.<sup>1</sup>

This is certainly looking somewhat far ahead, but it will appear extravagant only to those who are wedded to a narrowly Western point of view. Such a point of view becomes ever less tenable in view of the rapid decline of Western civilisation in our day, and there is no respectable authority for persisting in it.

Human systems of thought, no less than the political systems described by Plato, have each their germs of decay which will eventually work themselves out unless neutralised by the influence of another system. While making due allowance for the influence of divine providence in the Christian thought of the West, we must not forget that grace worked by adapting and combining diverse natural elements, and has in fact so worked in producing the Catholic synthesis that we know, built up as it is with stones from Jerusalem, Athens, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome and many other places.

A thousand years of schism were bound to make our synthesis somewhat lopsided in a Westerly direction. The Latin scholastic element has been allowed to grow somewhat disproportionately and has not been slow in manifesting its peculiar danger: a too rigid conceptualism, tending towards rationalism and legalism. At the same time the theology of the East has been starved of influences which would have corrected the defects of its own more intuitive method, made it less vague, more progressive and fruitful. The reunion for which we pray should bring mutual refreshment to East and West from the spiritual and intellectual treasures of the two traditions.

<sup>1</sup> *Le mystère du salut des nations*, p. 130.

But why stop there? Have the age-old cultures of the Farther East nothing to offer towards the integration of human thought with divine revelation? Has the mystical genius of Persia, the metaphysical genius of India, or the ethical genius of China, no providential part to play in elucidating those points of the deposit of faith which are still obscure to us? It would be rash, presumptuous and parochial-minded for us Westerners to answer: Nothing.

However that may be, the bridge between the extremes of West and East can hardly be any other than the spiritual and intellectual tradition of the Eastern Church. A healing of the schism, then, should be of the greatest help to the Church's missionary task in Asia. Since the schism the Eastern Church has done little to evangelise the pagan world; when it divides the mission-field with the Latins on a basis of cultural affinities, the happiest results are to be anticipated. Even Islam, perhaps, so long and so stubbornly resistant to Latin missionaries, might yield to a new approach through the Eastern arm of a reunited Church.

There have, of course, been repeated and fruitful mutual influences between East and West in the course of the ages: for example, the monastic influence from Egypt and Asia Minor, spreading through St Benedict to the whole Western world, or the later influence of Latin theology on Russian Orthodoxy. But these influences have been all too few and too discontinuous since the schism. They have not been strong enough to prevent one-sided developments of thought and life arising from the respective ethos of either side.

In support of this, let us recall Schweitzer's distinction between the cultures most characteristic of West and East as respectively *weltbejahend* and *weltverneinend*—a very broad distinction, calling for many reservations, but true as far as it goes. Western civilisation, especially in its latest phase, does tend to affirm worldly and material values to the neglect and even the denial of the transcendent or spiritual. And the religious cultures of the East do often disparage the former unduly in their noble affirmation of the latter—a disparagement which can, in India, go so far as to deny this world's objective reality. There is obviously room here for mutual correction. Tendencies which are ideally complementary have become polarised and hostile. A truce and a re-mixing are called for. If there is hope of a future for civilisation, it lies surely

in some such *rapprochement* of Western and Eastern cultures, spirit and thought. There is certainly no hope in the prospect of the West stampeding and proselytising any further along the path of applied science while the East continues to sit down in umbilical contemplation.

The division between the Eastern and Western cultures and mentalities is a relatively recent phenomenon and the result of historical accident rather than of geography. The rapid spread of Western technical civilisation is tending to obliterate it, but the two types are still clearly distinguishable. The Eastern type represents a more primitive stage of culture, which was once universal; the Western is a divergence from this along a special line, the line marked out by Aristotle, Bacon, Newton, the new science and the industrial revolution. We of the West tend to think of this divergence as the highroad of culture and to regard other cultures as backward by comparison. We are proud of our gains and forget how much we have lost in our unrelenting progress along the path of rationalism and materialism. Only lately, in the lurid glare of world wars and nuclear fission, are we beginning to pause and reflect that perhaps we have travelled too fast and too far along this road—that further advance in the same direction spells disaster—that perhaps the ancient cultures still surviving in the East have something yet to say to us.

Western Christianity has not, of course, gone all the way with Western civilisation. On the contrary, it has been a restraining influence on the drift towards rationalism and materialism. Nevertheless it is deeply involved in the ways of the Western mind. Its theological development has been in accordance with both the genius and the limitations of the West, which loves the measurable and definable, the field of its great successes, and shrinks from the illimitable and unfathomable and transcendent, the uncomfortable scene of its failures. On neither side, of course, does the one tendency altogether exclude the other, or there would be an end to Christian thought; but speaking generally, the theologians of the Western Church are more cataphatically than apophatically minded,<sup>2</sup> those of the Eastern Church the reverse. The tendency of the East has been towards an exaggeration of the 'Christian paradox', that of the West towards a

<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the *via affirmatiōis et eminentiæ* is more congenial to our scholastics than the *via remotionis et negationis*.

minimising of it, towards an over-affirmation of worldly values and an undue deference to rational science. This divergence has increased since the schism, and grown apace in Protestantism. The Fathers of the Church in both East and West looked at nature from the point of view of the supernatural; and right into the middle ages the Pseudo-Dionysius, who is apophysis *in excelsis*, was venerated in the West—but who among us cares much for him now? Some schoolmen, under the banner of Aristotle, began to look at the supernatural from the point of view of nature, marking the analogies and soft-peddalling the antilogies, gradually detaching philosophy from theology, and thereby starting a new epoch of thought which was to end, after the successive revolts of the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment, in the secularism of today.

The Christian East has had no scholastic period, no Renaissance, no Reformation, and the Enlightenment barely ruffled its placid surface. Its type of thought is still that of the patristic age, more theological than philosophical, more biblical than scholastic, with a tendency towards excessive world-negation, the practical consequence of its emphasis on the 'paradox'. The Catholic Church holds a middle position between this extreme and the opposite one, Evangelical Protestantism with its utter incomprehension and contempt of the monastic, the ascetic and the mystical.<sup>3</sup> But even the average Western Catholic (particularly the Anglo-Saxon) is not perhaps as sympathetic as he might be towards contemplatives, stylites, sufis, fakirs, or whatever they may be called. The practical life of the pastorate and the teaching and nursing orders is what he really understands and appreciates. It is only with an effort and a wry face that he can admit even the Carthusian and Carmelite programmes into his scheme of the Christian life.

It has been just the reverse in the Eastern Church. Pastoral and welfare work has been relatively neglected, and the main emphasis thrown on to the contemplative side of the Christian life. Everything—life, liturgy and thought—looks towards divine contemplation as the Christian's goal even on earth, and theology is not adequately distinguished from mysticism. One need only mention the enduring influence of the Hesychastic movement and the spread of its aims and methods to all classes of the Orthodox

3 A classic instance of this is R. A. Vaughan's *Hours with the Mystics, passim*.

Church.<sup>4</sup> In spite of a certain tendency to shade off into yoga, this emphasis on contemplation is surely right. It is the great need of our Western world, the only remedy for its mortal sickness. But it requires authoritative guidance. The *starets* in the Eastern Church, like the *pir* or the *guru* outside it, is too much a law to himself to be a safe guide for other souls.

The Orthodox East has certainly been generally faithful to the ancient tradition of the Church. But tradition is not enough. The living organ of authority is also needed, and only the See of Peter can supply this. Rome likewise has kept the tradition, but having also kept the organ of authority, it has been able to develop it, as a tree from a seed. Before the schism the Eastern Church was in the forefront of theological development, but since that time it has been more or less stagnant for want of the rejected authority. It is indeed a remarkable thing that it has continued for so long separated from the organ of supreme authority without falling into heresy. Its safeguard has been its extreme tenacity of ancient tradition, its suspicion of all innovation. This has given it a static and uniform character, in contrast with the rich diversity of individual development which has been possible under the guidance of the Roman See. (Protestantism, having rejected both the authority and the tradition, has ever since been casting off the remaining marks and doctrines of a Christian Church and moving towards a 'liberalism' which is hardly distinguishable from natural religion.)

The chief doctrines developed in the Western Church have been those of grace and free will, justification and satisfaction, purgatory, papal supremacy, and the authority and institutional aspects of the Church. These developments reflect on the whole the practical and organising genius of the West with its emphasis on the this-worldly aspects and implications of the Incarnation and its interest in the individual and his rights and duties. And this has made the Western Church the great champion of the spiritual freedom of the individual against all the encroachments of civil authority. It has admittedly also at times exposed it to the danger of corruption through power.

Eastern theology, on the other hand, has laid more stress on the

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the *Philokalia*, and its popularisation in *The Way of a Pilgrim*, by an anonymous Russian author (Eng. tr. R. M. French, 1931, 1943), but cf., also Fr Gervase Mathew's review of the *Philokalia* in this number of BLACKFRIARS (p. 612).

other-worldly aspects of the Incarnation, on the apocalyptic and universal rather than the temporary and individual, on the final glory rather than on the present organisation of an imperfect world. It has fought shy of 'juridical' notions; its soteriology is content to dwell on the mystical aspects of redemption as rising with Christ, incorporation with Christ and participation in the divine nature; it is less interested in the institutional side of the Church than in its spiritual aspect as the Mystical Body of Christ. The feast which appeals to it most is Easter, whereas in the West it is Christmas. This predominant interest in the transcendent has made the Eastern Church an easier victim to state tyranny and disposed it to acquiesce in this rather than resist it and to wash its hands of such sublunary interests as social justice.<sup>5</sup>

The two halves of Christendom, then, are truly complementary, as are also in so many respects the civilisations of East and West. The half which by divine providence has kept the seat of infallible authority has kept all the constituents of an integral Christianity. But their relative development has not been equal, indeed could not be so, given the inequalities of the human and historical medium. Certain elements predominate at certain times and places, while others are temporarily obscured. The approach to perfection is in proportion to the approach to absolute universality. In a world of such diversity, each race or culture has something to contribute towards the realisation of the ideal catholic whole. The long estrangement of the two senior partners in Christendom has been a grave misfortune for both sides, and great would be the gain for both sides in an eventual reunion.

In this same reunion lies perhaps the best hope of forestalling the catastrophe towards which the post-Christian civilisation of the West, impelled by its inherent logic, is dragging the whole world. A reintegration of culture with a religion that is completely catholic, neither of the East nor of the West but equally at home in both, could counteract the germs of decay of both East and West and gradually forge an oecumenical civilisation which might at last lay down its arms and with them the menace of self-destruction.

<sup>5</sup> An excellent sketch of the contrasting theological trends from the Catholic side is given by J. Tuciak: *Wege ostlicher Theologie*. (Bonn, 1946.)